

Characters

- David
- Trinity
- Miss Maybell
- Brother Washington
- Brother Bowser
- Sister Washington
- Sister Bowser
- Mister Percy
- Luther
- Alvin
- Earnestine
- Mr' Johnson
- Mrs' Johnson
- Harold Johnson

Prologue

*High high up in the sky
Higher than you can guess
A couple of troublemaking Imps
Are looking for a party to wreck
One's called David and one's called Trinity
They sourgrape about how boring earth is
And about how dull life can be
TRINITY*

-there just doesnt seem to be anything doing

DAVID

-its Saturday night I tell you Surely somewhere theres got to be a party brewing

*Just think as soon as we break it
Just think our last test is through
Just think we'll be full-fledged devils me and . . .*

LA DA DE DAH LA LA, sings Miss Maybell's niece, Earnestine, in the kitchen of her auntie's apartment.

TRINITY

-did you hear that wasn't that pretty

DAVID

-its just one of those damn angels

*David is overbearing and takes himself for boss
Trinity who had been young is deeply touched by the melody
To change the subject, David asks why he joined up . . .
Trinity says his folks had forced him to be perfect
He never had even one bitsy chance to be mean
His father it seems had decided . . .*

HA HA HAHA HA. A burst of laughter comes from Miss Maybell's living room.

*A party--they scream
Lets get em
They go into a dive
The black sky all around
A murky world far below
The full moon behind
They brag to pass the time
About how they are going to be in clover
About what big time party poopers they are
About just raising a little hell and its all over
About changing into cockroaches and gliding under the doors
About getting inside houses and taking human form
About scaring doo-doo out of folks . . .*

HAHA HA another wave of joy shoots up from Miss Maybell's place.

I sure love parties, says Brother Washington.

It's Saturday night, ain't it, proclaims Miss Maybell.

What's Saturday night for, anyway?

To have a party at your place, Honey, everybody knows that announces Mister Percy, Miss Maybell's sort of half-boyfriend.

HA HA HA the [g]uests roar.

*David steepens his drive
He is in a wild rage
He wants to boil em in oil
He wants to stretch em on the rack
He wants to watch em roast at the stake
Trinity says they cant do that
Because no one believes in that anymore
I know I know, David agrees sadly
And quotes the first rule from Satans handbook
"The only strength a Devil has
Is the sense of evil in the minds of men"*

It's the truth all right "The only strength a Devil has is the sense of evil in the minds of men," or to break that down as Luther the rat who lives in the baseboard of Miss Maybell's kitchen wall would say If you ain't got ripoff in your heart, the Devil can't rip you off. [1](#)

Luther is so disgusted with the injustice of Imps like David and Trinity coming down and taking rat or roach form to get inside places to do their dirty work and disgracing honest rats and roaches and giving the whole Rodent and Cockroach races bad names that he might even go on a crusade. Brother Luther rat does not dig that jive one bit -Irresponsible Imps coming down and getting innocent bystanders rats and roaches who haven't done a thing all squashed and stuff.

One day reflecting on Imps led to philosophizing about life and Luther wrote a tune to dramatize his grievance -as the newspapers would say to high-light the situation, to popularize his people's plight. . . . Anyway Luther sings the lead and his sidekick Alvin the cockroach hums, boo-boos, and whistles the accompaniment.

SOMEDAY IT SEEMS THAT IT
JUST DONT EVEN PAY (boo boo)
TO GET OUT OF BED (boo boo)
BEIN A RAT AND BEIN A RAT
AINT QUITE THE SAME
OH HOW COME WE ALWAYS GET THE BLAME
A BODY GETS TIRED OF GETTING ACCUSED OUT THEY NAME
ITS A CRYIN SHAME
GUESS I'LL GET MY RETRIBUTION
IN THE GREAT BEYOND
AH, BUT IN THE MEANTIME — WHAT CAN I SAY
IM SURE YOULL AGREE WITH ME WHEN I SAY
OH BABY (hummm m m)
SOMEDAYS IT SEEMS THAT IT
JUST DONT EVEN PAY
TO GET OUT OF BED
YOU GET TIRED OF TAKEN THE GOOD WITH THE BAD
WHEN THERE AINT NEVER NO GOOD (boo boo)
AND YOU ALWAYS END UP -GETTIN HAD
WHEN EVERY COTTON PICKIN -ALLEY CAT
SEES YOU AS THE RAT THATS GONNA
MAKE THAT BIG REPUTATION FOR HIM
NOT TO MENTION LUNCH
MAYBE A LITTLE DINNER, TOO (whistle)
YOU THINK ITS ROUGH ON YOU
ITS ROUGH ON ME DONT YOU SEE (hummm)
SOMEDAYS IT SEEMS THAT IT
JUST DONT EVEN PAY
TO GET OUT OF BED
WHY THEY ALWAYS DO THE THINGS THEY DO? SURE . . . SURE
EVERYBODYS AIR IS POISON BUT EVERYBODYS CHEESE AINT POISON TOO
LIFE IS EITHER A PEOPLE RACE
OR A HUMAN BEING TRAP . . .
SOMETIMES A BODY CAN GET TIRED OF
TAKEN THE CRAP
OH BELIEVE ME WHEN I SAY I SAY
SOMETIMES IT SEEMS THAT IT
JUST DONT EVEN PAY (Hummm)
TO GET OUT OF BED

Just like Luther is always saying, life is a trip, Jim . . . His hole getting plugged, his buddy getting mugged . . . Someday it seems that it just don't even pay to get out of bed.

In the meantime the Imps arrive on Miss Maybell's fire escape, with David reminiscing about the good old days, Superstition and silver spikes in the heart before dawn, Innocent folks getting witchhunted, Evil eyes and babies malformed. Trinity brags that they will charge in and get'em.

*Well not exactly together; David corrects him.
I'll wait outside and you go in
And David almost convinces him
Until Trinity looks into the window
And realizes they have landed uptown
Trinity says Harlem is off-limits to beginners
And he was white before anyway
David says they should stay
Trinity wants to get in the wind
So what, David says, he was white before too
There wasn't the slightest thing [...] fear*

*And first, party pooping was easy
And second, in case of trouble he'd be near
And third, what could be more ordinary
Than those plain simple old folks in there²*

Miss Maybell's apartment is long and narrow, three rooms placed end to end like coaches on a train. In fact, telling it like it is, folks in Harlem have come up with an appropriate nickname. Because it saves an inch here and a foot there, a railroad flat is a favored style of greedy landlords everywhere. And since it's awlays open season on exploiting black behinds and that's just a plain old downright reality, uptown in Harlem, railroad flats aren't hard to find. At Miss Maybell's first there's the kitchen, with the usual things plus the door that leads to the outside world, next the tiny middle room with a toilet that looks like a closet and the bed Earnestine is using piled up now with the guests' coats, last there's Miss Maybell's room, a combination parlor-dance floor-bedroom, etc', anyway where most of the happenings are at . . .

TRINITY

--it doesnt look tough

DAVID

--attaboy thats the stuff

*They are gonna head em for the hills
Its gonna be over quicker than a wink
Any kinda party is easy to kill
If the smoke--lightning--thunder number fails
Stop the music, just finish the food or drink*

TRINITY

faltering:

*--There must be a reason,
That in the entire history of devilment
No Imp that ever went party breaking in Harlem
Even got back to headquarters*

DAVID

scoffing:

-Old wives tales, Are you ready?

Trinity nods yessiree and he is so eager, he doesn't even look for a rat hole he just takes cockroach form and goes under the door.

1 Mice can talk you know but just like a lot of our folks a lot of their folks abused the privilege so the Mouse King had rapping (or ratting as it was called at the time) cut out.

2 The truth is the light and nothing could be more a picture of ordinary plain old downright reality, uptowns where its at, than Miss Maybells railroad flat.

Scene 1

1

In Miss Maybell's bedroom, that is the living room, there's so much joint-jumping, laughing and rapping and such going on that the music from the record player is drowned out. Miss Maybell gets up and goes over to the snack tray.

Come on you all, Miss Maybell says, and she picks up the tray and starts making the rounds. Take some more to open your appetites up.

Earnestine jumps to her feet to help her. Miss Maybell shoos her away.

Miss Maybell then turns to her niece and asks the child how old she thinks her old auntie is anyway, does she figure that she is so feeble that she isn't able to pull her old carcass out of a chair.

Earnestine, who isn't on to big city teasing, tries to speak but ends up getting all shy and flustered and ducks her head.

And don't you dare answer that, Miss Maybell warns her niece with a wink to her guests but she can't keep a straight face anymore and she and all the company, the Bowsers, the Washingtons and Brother Percy, burst out laughing. Earnestine finally realizes she is being teased and starts to laugh too.

Her laugh is like silver or crystal, something priceless and precious like an angel's giggle.

UmmmmMM, uummmMM . . . this is sure good, says Brother Washington. He is around forty-five or fifty, like all the rest of the guests, give or take a few springtimes. He is tall and rawboned with that look of somebody who can take care of himself in a dark alley if things get to that, good-looking too if your eyes aren't too out of joint with white folks' points of view. When I bite into this sandwich and shut my eyes I could swear I was right back down home at a good old-fashioned Southern Saturday night party.

Dont tell that lie, Brother Washington, jumps back Brother Bowser. Brother Bowser is all round and black, sort of a living bowling ball. You couldn't be back down south cause if you was back down home your hands would be too sore from pickin cotton to hardly hold a sandwich in the first place.

Everybody cracks up at Brother Bowser's comeback.

Brother Washington goes along with the ribbing, he grins and moans and rubs his shoulders. Well, maybe I aint got cotton picker's hands no more . . . but I sure got Red-cap's back.

Everybody laughs.

Lord knows, Brother Washington, you got a point there, says Sister Bowser. Yes sir, if it aint one thing it's another . . . I haven't been picking no cotton lately and pulling no sock around, but maid-working ain't so easy either. She rubs her ankles to demonstrate the point.

My poor feet feel like they are thirteen days in every week! (and a body has to have sympathy for her feet, no Lord it's not hard to believe her either, she has got to weigh three hundred or more if she weighs a pound)

Amen. Brother Bowser feels that sure is The Good Gracious God's Gospel truth they're speaking if he ever heard it . . . 'cause if it aint one thing it's sure another . . . He doubts if that man he chauffeurs for ever heard of union wages or no special amount of working hours in a week.

Brother Percy agrees, if it aint one thing it's another, he's sorted so many letters he's got post-office palsy . . . Everybody agrees about if it not being one thing it's sure another, AMEN.

The music stops and Brother Percy gets up to tend to the phonograph.

I gotta go see about things in the kitchen, Miss Maybell says putting the snack tray down and turning in the direction of the kitchen.

Listen, this here is Saturday night, can't you all change the subject, can't you find nothing else to talk about except how hard you work all week?

I'll go, Auntie, Earnestine volunteers, and she hops up and pushes aside the curtain and leaves. Miss Maybell sighs with pride in the direction of her niece's exit and sits back down.

You sure are right, Miss Maybell . . . time just flies and Saturday night only comes once a week, agrees Mrs' Washington, putting the conversation back on the track.

You know what they say, that after a while the two people making up a couple end up looking like each other, anyway as far as the Washingtons and Bowsers are concerned nothing could be truer, Sister Washington being a long raw-boned Sally to match her long drink of water husband and Sister Bowser with her three hundred pounds and more, a walking watermelon to match her bowling ball shaped mister.

Seems like it only comes once a month if you ask me, Brother Washington tosses in.

Lord knows I guess we're lucky to even get that, Miss Maybell says, and she asks them if they remember that old poem . . .

In the beginning
So the Bible says
Every second of every day was party time
Saturday night party time
In the beginning
So the Bible says
The Lord wanted man to have it nice
But Adam and Eve acted ugly
And ever since poor folks pay the price
All the folks break up.

Sure black people laugh a lot when they get together, but black laughter, real black laughter, is more than just fun, it's Amen to this and Amen to that and it's socializing like you want to, it's an Instant-Cadillac and most of all it's FREEDOM . . . it's Saturday night and all the folks break up again . . .

Sister Washington says that poem doesn't hardly even rhyme and she bets Miss Maybell made it up herself and that if so she better watch her step if she wants to get inside those pearly gates.

Well if the Lord can't take a little joke, Miss Maybell says, she's not so sure heaven is such a wonderful place anyhow, and everybody bursts out laughing again.

Hey do you all remember that song the railroad gangs used to sing, Brother Percy asks, The Eight Day Week? Brother Percy is standing in his favorite spot, by the victrola, and he has a record in one hand and a glass in the other, his two favorite objects. Brother Percy has a weakness for the dramatic but he doesn't go overboard behind it so nobody really minds. He puts down the record, takes a gulp from his glass, puts that down too and strides to the center of the room. He strides although it couldn't be more than three steps. He spits on his hands, rubs them together and starts pantomiming a worker laying track on the railroad. He picks up an imaginary sledgehammer, raises it high over his head and shouts . . .

SUNDAY! . . . (he swings the sledgehammer and hits the spike)

HUMPH! . . . (everybody grunts in unison)

WE GO TO CHURCH AND WASH OUR SINS . . .

MONDAY! . . . (he swings the sledgehammer again)

HUMPH!

THE OLE WORK BEGINS

TUESDAY!

HUMPH!

The OLE WEEKS STILL NEW

WEDNESDAY!

HUMPH!

JUST ABOUT HALFWAY THROUGH

THURSDAY!

HUMPH!

TWO TO GO

FRIDAY

HUMPH!

JUST ONE MORE

SATURDAY!

HUMPH

WE GET OUR PAY!

SATURDAY NIGHT!

LORD!

THATS THE BIG DAY!

Mister Percy puts down his imaginary sledge and wipes his brow . . . The party gets it on more and more, laughing and yelling and having a good time . . . Miss Maybell starts to clap her hands in a double-time revival meeting tempo and begins

to sing that old refrain.

SATURDAY

SATURDAY NIGHT

SATURDAY NIGHT IS PARTYING TIME

The company joins in. And at the first verse Sister Bowser, light as a feather despite her size, jumps to her feet and does a couple of the latest steps and puts in her two cents' worth . . .

ALL THE WEEK MY FEET DONT STAND A CHANCE
BUT ON SATURDAY NIGHT IM READY TO DANCE

At the next verse Brother Washington gets up, does a little step and puts in his two pennies' worth too . . .

ALL THE WEEK I GET PAIN IN MY BACK!
BUT ON SATURDAY NIGHT I BALL EM BACK!
SATURDAY
SATURDAY NIGHT
SATURDAY NIGHT IS PARTYING TIME

By the middle of the refrain everybody is on their feet dancing . . .

When it's over they all flop into their seats clapping and yelling.

When it calms down Brother Washington swears to heaven or at least to the ceiling that he sure loves Saturday nights, Sister Washington agrees that there aint nothing better than a Saturday night party at Miss Maybell's and everybody Amens to that . . . Brother Percy puts on a record.

That's IT! THAT'S MY SONG! Mrs' Washington shouts, testifying to the world. It's her favorite number, yes it is. She points a finger at the pickup, yessir that's her song all right. She stands up, popping her fingers to the way-down steady beat. She moans and throws her head back to sing, yessir it's her song all right. The other folks shout encouragement and start their fingers snapping . . .

OOH OOOHHHH OOOHHHHHH
YOU CUT UP THE CLOTHES IN THE CLOSET OF MY DREAMS
YOU PULLED OFF THE SLEEVES AND RIPPED OUT THE SEAMS
TORE OUT THE LINING AND THE BUTTONS WERE ALL GONE
OOH OOOHHH OOOHHHHHH
BUT NOW I GOT ME THE STRENGTH TO PULL ONE MORE AGAIN

Saturday night for black folks and black music for black folks working its magic. Suddenly Mrs' Washington isn't a scrawny woman with a funny flowered dress on and an outrageous false flower stuck in her shiny store-bought hair standing in the middle of a poor room in a poor tenement singing the blues and snapping bony overworked fingers. Oh no, Saturday night does for her what it took Jesus to do for Lazarus. There she stands, yes Lord, born again, humming and swaying, a lovely willow of black womanhood, yes sir, come back out of the ashes of another week of hard times and shit, shit stacked on top of lifetimes of hard times and more shit. The prettiest sight in the world . . . Yessirree, winner and still champeen of the prettiest-sight-in-the-world contest, niggers doing their nigger thing on Saturday night nigguh night.

The other folks clap and sway to the tempo and Sister Washington keeps on keeping on . . . OOOOHHHH yes Lord it's HER SONG and she is moving on . . .

IM MOVING ON MOVING ON
YOU BURNED BIG OLE HOLES IN THE FUR COAT
OF SOME FINE PLANS FOR OUR FUTURE
IF I SAID I NEVER MISSED YOU
WELL CHILD I'D BE LYING
OH BUT I DONT EVEN MIND
SOMETIMES I COULDNT EVEN CATCH MY BREATH
OH AND I THOUGHT I WAS DYING
OH YES IF I SAID I NEVER MISSED YOU CHILD

I WOULD BE LYING
BUT NEVER AINT FOREVER
AND NOW I JUST DONT HAVE THAT TIME
DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME
IM MOVING ON MOVIN ON
OH WITH THAT NEW SWEET SWEET THING I'VE FOUND
MY DREAMS ARE AS CLEAN AS AN EASTER SUNDAY
ALL YEAR ROUND
WHAT I MEAN IS IM WEARING A NEW WARDROBE OF LOVE
IM MOVING ON MOVIN ON
YOU DONT MISS YOUR WATER
TILL YOUR WELL IS THROUGH
ONE THING SURE
IM NOT THIRSTY OVER YOU
IM MOVING ON MOVIN ON
YOU CUT UP THE CLOTHES IN THE CLOSET OF MY DREAMS
YOU PULLED OFF THE SLEEVES AND RIPPED OUT THE SEAMS
GOT ME A NEEDLE YOU BETTER BELIEVE IT
GOT ME SOME THREAD
GOT ME A THIMBLE TOO
NOW IM GOIN STRAIGHT AHEAD
YES YES YES
IM MOVING ON MOVIN ON
MOVIN ON MOVIN ON

Movin on, movin on, they sing, the spirit has got everybody. The song is over . . . Brother Percy puts on an old boogie-woogie and the folks get up and start to dancing.

In the meantime back at the oven in the kitchen Earnestine is bending over checking the roast and singing gaily to herself.

LA LALA DEDA . . .

Scene 2

2

Trinity-cum-roach scoots under the doorsill from the hallway . . . BAM . . . CRACKLE . . . A flash of light, a puff of smoke, a rattle of thunder and Trinity appears just inside the kitchen door.

Earnestine whirls around. They stare at each other. She is petrified and he is not sure exactly what his next move should be. Finally he remembers his party-breaking manual instructions and grabs the sides of his cape and jerks his arms up into the sinister, Dracula position.

Help! Earnestine gives a screech of terror and dashes out of the kitchen.

Trinity is very happy with himself, he can hardly believe his success. He hops around practicing horrible, heart-stopping poses at the sink and the refrigerator.

Earnestine runs through the middle rooms and bursts into the living room. Everything seems so normal so calm cool and collected, the phonograph is playing a slow blues and all the folks are dancing. She stands just over the doorsill half hidden by the curtain separating the rooms. She gets ahold of herself . . . And she starts trying to get Miss Maybell's attention.

Psst . . . Psst . . . Auntie! Psst . . . Psst but Miss Maybell, who is dancing with Brother Bowser, has her back to her niece.

Mrs' Bowser, dancing with Brother Washington, spots her.

Miss Maybell, Earnestine is calling you.

Miss Maybell turns and sees the frantic signals and excuses herself. Earnestine beckons her into the middle room and pulls the curtain for a conference. Miss Maybell heads straight for the kitchen, Earnestine stops her.

What's the matter anyhow, child, something burning in the oven?

Earnestine pulls her back. She points toward the kitchen and whispers that there's a man inside . . . Miss Maybell frowns.

. . . and he's acting very strange, Auntie.

Well, come on, child, show me, Miss Maybell says . . . They step into the kitchen.

One thing about the Devil, he sure doesn't believe in none of his Imps going raggedy. Trinity is standing there and he is clean for days. Probably the Devil told his clothes designer (He wanted people to be really knocked off their feet when one of his Imps appeared) and maybe Trinity's clothes were way-out for somewhere, somewhere else anyway, but not for Harlem because the very same instructions about giving people something to really knock them off their feet is what every self-respecting pimp in Harlem gives to his clothes designer too. Trinity has on a black snakeskin suit with red trim, red buttons, red shoes, a red coat with a black monkey fur lining on a red cape . . . Anyway, the style changes so rapidly in Harlem Miss Maybell gave up way back when trying to be up with the latest fashion.

Good evening, young man, says Miss Maybell politely.

No answer . . .

Auntie, I'm afraid, Earnestine whimpers.

Are you the insurance-selling man? asks Miss Maybell a little less politely. She leans toward Trinity and raises her voice a bit in case he's hard of hearing.

Suddenly, with a grand swoosh of his cape, Trinity jerks into a classic vampire position . . . Earnestine yelps and runs behind Miss Maybell. But Miss Maybell doesn't blow her cool like the Devil's handbooks says she is supposed to, instead she grabs the broom from the corner and raises it over her shoulder, like a batter at the plate.

Who is you? asks Miss Maybell. Trinity tries to outstare her but she stands her ground and he ends up doing the blinking.

What do you want around here, mister? . . . Where do you think you are anyhow! she demands.

Trinity starts striking all kinds of horrible postures trying to frighten Miss Maybell but she's been living in the neighborhood at least thirty years, surviving winos, riots, and junkies. And Trinity's little number doesn't faze her at all, weak hearts don't keep beating no thirty years in Harlem.

What do you want, I say! Miss Maybell is as cool as she wants to be.

Trinity leaps up on the kitchen table and strikes his most extraspecial-horrible pose.

Miss Maybell has just about had it with this cat and she tells him he'd be wise to get off her table. Trinity doesn't move. Once more Miss Maybell advises him he ought to get into the wind mighty quick.

Mister, you'd better get down off my table, whoever you are. You'd better say something mighty quick, or get out of my kitchen before I count to three! If you don't, I'm gonna knock your head clean off! Miss Maybell draws back her broom.

ONE!

Trinity doesn't budge.

TWO!

Trinity doesn't budge.

THR . . .

Laryngitis, Trinity rasps.

Larry who? Miss Maybell says, she watches his every move very suspiciously, broom cocked and ready to go.

Finally, at the last moment half changing tactics and half just plain old breaking down, Trinity starts making excuses. He pretends that he had trouble speaking because the collar of his cape was so tight it was choking his throat and giving him laryngitis. Miss Maybell doesn't recognize the word so he tugs at the bottom of the cape to demonstrate his predicament and to keep up his story.

Well, why didn't you say so in the first place, says Miss Maybell. She hasn't lowered her broom so he keeps pretending to struggle with the collar of his cape. Miss Maybell still stands there like Willy Mays at the bat.

Look here, Miss Maybell brandishes the broom, collar or no collar, you get down off my table! Trinity scrambles off the table.

Earnestine, honey, help him with his collar.

Earnestine comes from behind Miss Maybell and then she hesitates.

Go ahead, child . . . go ahead, your eyes are younger than mine.

Trinity tugs at his collar. Earnestine approaches. She stands before him . . . they are both very nervous . . . she slowly reaches up to his collar and their hands touch . . . An angel or something passes and in the stillness and silence of that moment a tiny melody, sparkling and lovely, drifts into the kitchen . . . maybe, though, it was just the phonograph from the front room.

Go ahead, child, Miss Maybell coaches go ahead.

Earnestine lifts Trinity's hands from his collar and unfastens the button. Trinity gives a mock sigh of relief, he has recovered from the magic moment when their hands touched and once again he is the Devil's apprentice, the conniving party breaker.

Earnestine is still bewitched. She breaks into a happy little giggle.

What are you laughing at so, honey? asks Miss Maybell.

I don't know, auntie . . . I'm just laughing I guess.

Miss Maybell looks back and forth at the two of them without a comment.

Good evening, says Trinity, trying to pour on the charm. They look at him.

That's what you said when you came into the kitchen. Trinity explains, rubbing his throat for effect. I couldn't answer you then . . . ha ha . . .

Miss Maybell glances at the front door and makes a mental note to get the door locks fixed first thing Monday morning.

She asks Trinity what he's selling.

I'm not selling anything. I was just wandering around . . . er, I'm a stranger . . . well anyway, I heard your party and it sounded so happy I just wanted to come too. Perhaps there is a God for Devils too because Trinity lands right on Miss Maybell's weak spot. She melts into a beaming smile -it's just like down home . . .

Sure, young man, come in, sure, welcome to the party! I'm Miss Maybell, this here is my niece, Earnestine. Ha! Lordy! Here I am inviting you to the party and everything like it was my party, it usually is but not this Saturday night . . . this here is Earnestine's party tonight, it's her birthday party she turned twenty this week -you gotta ask her, she's the boss!

May I come to your party, Earnestine? Trinity asks demurely.

I . . . of . . . course, you're welcome, Mister . . . Trinity . . .

Just Trinity.

Miss Maybell turns to Earnestine, well aint that nice, now she's got somebody her own age until the Johnsons get here with their boy and no telling when they gonna get there either, they gotta always make a big entrance. She turns back to Trinity and tells him it's Earnestine's party, but she don't know no young people yet, since she's only been up here a month.

Em . . . uh . . . that's fine, stammers Trinity. Miss Maybell doesn't need any encouragement on the subject of her niece.

Dont she speak nice Trinity? . . . Come right up here and got a job -yes she did! Just like that, not working as no maid in somebodys kitchen . . . she's a genuine salesgirl!

Trinity says sarcastically that he's sure no doubt that she must work at Saks Fifth Avenue.

It aint Fifth, but you almost got it right, says Miss Maybell. Its five, five and ten, except too it's only a couple of blocks over on Lenox. Lord, I goes in that store every chance I get, just to see my niece, my own sister's daughter, doing a real educated job.

Earnestine is getting worried about maybe it not being polite leaving the other guests all alone.

Them ain't no guests, Miss Maybell explains. them is just plain friends.

(A burst of merriment floats in from the living room . . .)

Besides it don't sound like we missed too much. But I guess we should be getting on back anyhow. Welcome to the party, Trinity, an you make yourself at home.

They go into the middle room, and Miss Maybell tells Trinity to put down his cape on Earnestine's bed with the other guests' wraps.

Trinity spots a mirror above a chest of drawers. He sneaks a peek to study his black reflection for the first time. Outside of the fact that he is brown instead of pink, and his hair is kinky and his lips seem a little bigger, he isn't much changed. In fact, about the biggest difference in the young man staring back at him and what he used to be is his black snakeskin suit with the red piping.

Ha, Lord, Miss Maybell chuckles at the thought of the unexpected guest ain't this going to just break the party up!

With a big smile she pushes the curtain aside and leads the way into the living room.

Scene 3

3

Miss Maybell brings in Trinity. The folks are dancing the hucklebuck and they greet him with open arms. Without losing a step they form a line and one by one waltz over to shake his hand.

Now, Trinity, you just go ahead and enjoy yourself, Miss Maybell says. Come on, child, we got some more getting ready to do . . .

Just make yourself at home now, she tosses over her shoulder to him as she and Earnestine leave to go back to the kitchen.

The waves of chatter roll back from the shore momentarily and Trinity snatches the pause to try to figure the best way to break up the party, he casts a quick look around the room.

Four walls, two windows, a vintage radiator, an even earlier vintage fireplace that has eroded down to a mantel-piece that's sort of become a shelf by default, a thick vertical sewer pipe (relatively new). Plus furniture all pushed back to make room for the festivities, a card table laid out with refreshments -some sandwiches, some glasses and a bottle of whiskey.

The first mischief Trinity tries to accomplish is to trip the table over and make it look like an accident.

LORD, Sister Bowser shouts, BE CAREFUL THERE, you're getting your foot tangled up in the table leg.

Trinity moves his foot sheepishly. Um . . . er . . . really?

Sister Bowser jumps up and comes over and gives the table a shake to show Trinity the old thing aint too strong . . . It used to fall down at least once a party, but now they all take turns keeping an eye on it . . . She asks Trinity if he would like something since a party isn't anything without refreshment.

Dont forget music either, cuts in Brother Percy, shuffling through an armload of records and singing LET ME BE YOUR LITTLE DOG DA-DA, TILL YOUR BIG DOG COMES.

No sir, don't forget the music, says Brother Washington. He wouldn't be surprised if Miss Maybell didn't have one of the best record collections in all Harlem.

How about you? . . . er . . . er . . . Trinity . . . like music? Brother Percy questions friendly-like.

Music? Trinity whirls around and almost upsets the table, accidentally this time, but Sister Bowser is on the job and grabs it and steadies it.

Brother Percy shuffles through the stock of records he has picked up. He holds one up to Trinity, telling him how terrific it is. He lovingly puts the rest in a pile on a chair by the phonograph. Trinity's brain begins to click, it looks like Lady Luck is smiling down on him at last.

Yes, Trinity says, half to the guests and half to himself, Yes, sir, Music, good old record music . . . yes sir . . . and what would a party be without good old records?

You got something there, says Sister Washington, a party aint a party without music . . . While everybody is agreeing that a party isn't a party without music, Trinity edges over to Brother Percy and the stack of records.

What's the name of it, Trinity asks, pointing to the record Brother Percy is holding.

Be my guest, youngblood, play whichever side you want while I put a little kick in my drink, Mister Percy says. He hands Trinity the record and goes over to the refreshment table.

Trinity pretends to study the label, but as soon as nobody is looking he slips the record on the pile with all the others and then sits down on the stack as hard as he can.

-A-Aahhh. Brother Percy takes a sip of his drink and holds his glass up and smiles at it. Now aint that the truth!

It sure is, Sister Bowser says.

-Yessir that sure is the truth. Brother Percy takes another sip and then turns to Trinity. How about that music, Brother Trinity. Didn't you pick one out yet?

Oh my goodness! Trinity leaps to his feet and tries to act like he is horror-struck. He puts one hand over his eyes and points behind himself with the other one. I guess that's the end of the music.

THE END OF THE MUSIC???

I sat on all the records. I broke all the records! Trinity is barely able to hide how pleased he is with himself. I'm sorry, but I guess there goes the party . . . no music, no party!

The company whoops with laughter. They all crowd around Trinity, patting him on the back and telling him not to worry, he didn't hurt the records.

Look, the records aint broke, Brother Percy explains, even the old ones, you can bite 'em, bend 'em, burn 'em . . . they're unbreakable, they got some kinda new stuff you wipe them with and they won't break.

Mister Percy puts a record on the phonograph. The music starts to blare and everybody gives a cheer. Trinity is a little stunned by his setback . . . once again victory has eluded him.

He pulls himself together and decides to drink up everything until there's nothing left for the rest of the guests.

He points to the half-full whiskey bottle on the refreshment table. Mrs' Bowser pours him a healthy drink and starts to add water to it but Trinity stops her with a manly wag of his finger. She tries to tell him it's mighty strong, but Trinity takes the glass and empties it in one long draft.

My! says Sister Bowser. I guess I'll keep my big mouth closed!

Trinity coughs and his eyes go bloody but he hangs on in there and signals for a refill.

One thing, you sure are serious about your drinking, aint you, says Sister Bowser.

The guests stop dancing and start staring.

When it comes to drinking, he sure dont play around, do he! puts in Brother Bowser.

It's Trinity's big chance -all eyes are upon him. Trinity drains his glass in one long heroic swig. He signals for another refill.

You killed it, Sister Bowser says, showing him the empty bottle.

VICTORY AT LAST . . . Trinity snatches the empty bottle and holds it aloft. Victory at last . . . Just a little perseverance . . . visions of beautiful bat-shaped full-fledged Imp wings flash through his head. He reels from a mixture of ecstasy and whiskey. For an instant all the guests and the walls seem to be leaning at crazy angles . . . he steadies himself.

I did? I did? Yes, I did, didnt I? Trinity is overjoyed. He faces the guests, he flings his arms wide begging forgiveness. Excuse me, excuse me . . . A party must have drinks for the throat just like it must have music for the ears . . . I'm sorry, terribly sorry taking such liberties, drinking up everything, you must want to have me crucified . . . I . . . I . . .

Everybody stares at him but they aren't angry, they are just trying to figure out what he is babbling about and what's all this junk about being crucified and stuff. Everybody looks at him slightly puzzled. Trinity's back is to the refreshments as Sister Bowser interrupts to pour him a shot from a fresh bottle she's holding.

You sure you don't want a little water this time

Trinity whirls around and freezes. He stares at the new bottle. Then, without taking his eyes off it, he reaches over and touches the old bottle in his left hand with his right hand to make sure it's not an optical illusion or something . . .

You've got ANOTHER one! Trinity feels betrayed. You had it all the time!

Don't be shy, Trinity, says Brother Percy cheerfully. That was just the first bottle, there's plenty more, we got a kitty box and everybody brings a bottle. He indicates the box of spare liquor under the table and gives it a nudge with his toe, then reaches in his overalls and pulls out a bottle . . .

Bottles begin to appear as if by magic, from behind chairs, from inside coats and purses, everyone holds up a bottle and waves it! . . . They urge Brother Trinity to drink up and make himself right at home.

It's Saturday, Brother Trinity! says Sister Washington.

Aint it the truth! says Brother Bowser. Everybody laughs and starts singing . . .

SATURDAY

SATURDAY NIGHT

SATURDAY NIGHT IS PARTYING TIME

There are five or six sandwiches left on the table and Trinity, who hasn't learned much of a lesson, decides he'll eat everything up and begins to wolf them down. He finishes the sandwiches and starts doing his number about the party being broken . . . and about a party not being anything without food and about how he is so sorry he has eaten up everything and before he can finish Miss Maybell and Earnestine come in with another big tray of sandwiches.

Here's another little batch of snacks to hold you till the food gets ready, Miss Maybell announces . . . At this, Trinity is just about ready to burst into tears.

Sister Washington says it sure is Saturday night and Brother Bowser says aint it the truth and Sister Bowser starts to sing and everybody joins her.

SATURDAY

SATURDAY NIGHT

SATURDAY NIGHT IS PARTYING TIME

Are you enjoying yourself? Miss Maybell asks Trinity.

Immensely! He weaves a little . . . a wave of drunkenness comes and goes . . . Trinity steadies himself.

Miss Maybell pushes a sandwich into his hand and brags about how her niece made them. Earnestine comes out of the kitchen and Miss Maybell leaves the young folks alone standing by the refreshment table and goes back to the kitchen to work on the dinner. Earnestine gropes for something to say, she asks him to try a sandwich.

Do you like it? I made them.

Oh, so you made them.

Yes, I made them, Earnestine admits timidly. Do you like them?

Trinity takes a bite, gives a dramatic pause, . . . (opportunity is knocking) . . . he tosses the sandwich back on the tray as if it were a dog turd.

NO! It's the rottenest, dumbest, stupidest, most awful sandwich I ever tasted!

Earnestine covers her face in shame and runs into the middle room and throws herself across her bed, sobbing. Trinity follows to the threshold of her room, he pushes aside the curtain . . . There he stands, silhouetted by the light from the living room, a big-time force of evil. He sticks his head in the room and tosses out a last stinky look for the hell of it . . .

Phew, TERRIBLE! Absolutely no good.

Scene 4

4

Trinity swaggers back into the living room with a triumphant leer on his face . . .

Nope, the party's not yet broken and he knows he hasn't received his full-fledged Imp wings. But still, after all, he offered his Soul to Satan for the chance, the glorious chance to be mean, and he's just done it . . . Yipeee he's just DONE IT, he's just had his first taste of fulfilling his ambition. He has just been pettily, unjustly, sinfully, viciously, horribly, glamorously MEAN.

All the liquor Trinity has gulped down is finally beginning to catch up with him and he begins to sing a song he made up . . .

IM A BAD CHARACTER
IM THE NEW KING OF BAD CHARACTERS
AND YOUD BETTER WATCH OUT FOR ME
IM GIVING THE WORLD AMPLE WARNING
AND CHICKS (JUST ASK MR FREUD) E-SPECIAL-LY
JUST GET IN MY PATH AND SEE
OH IM A BAD CHARACTER
OUT OF THE WAY! OUT OF THE WAY!
THERES NO TELLING WHAT I MIGHT DO
OH IM A BAD CHARACTER
GET YOUR HEARTSTRINGS TANGLED IN MINE
POOF-TOO BAD, HARD CHEESE, TOUGH LUCK -MADAME
IM A BAD CHARACTER
GET YOUR VALENTINE MIXED WITH MINE
OH, LADY -ITS GONNA BE ROUGH ON YOU
POLLUTION AINT NOTHING . . . WHEN I GET THROUGH

Inside himself Trinity's song is as clear as a bell but outside his words are so slurred the guests assume he is just humming along with the music on the pickup. From time to time his knees wobble, but all in all he is still fairly steady and no one pays any special attention . . .

IM THE END PRODUCT OF ALL BAD CHARACTERS

IM EVERY VILLAIN ROLLED INTO ONE
THREE CHEERS FOR MY ANCESTORS
BLUEBEARD AND LANDRU
MOVE OVER COUSIN DRACULA AND TELL THE REST OF THE FAMILY
IM THE NEW BAD CHARACTER
WAIT TILL I GET MY HANDS ON YOU!

Now the booze and food catch up with him, he reels . . . the room swirls, the guests seem to toss back and forth like ships in a storm . . . he wags a drunken finger at the world . . .

I'VE WARNED YOU FOLKS, I'VE WARNED YOU

. . . he has a short burst of semi-soberness . . .

IM THE NEW BAD CHARACTER
THE NEW PUBLIC ENEMY NUMBER ONE!

. . . then he goes all drunk again and starts to fall. Still no one seems too upset. Brother Percy and Brother Washington catch him before he hits the floor.

Lord, Lord, says Sister Washington, young men will do it every time.

Aint it the truth! Brother Bowser says, and starts reminiscing . . .

Why I remember when I was a young fella . . .

Come on, Brother Washington, Brother Percy breaks in, lets get him in the bathroom before he messes everything up . . . Brother Washington says he's ready and they half walk and half carry Trinity toward the toilet in the middle room. They just make it, Trinity stumbles into the john, sick sounds and then the toilet flushing come through the door . . . They don't notice Earnestine whimpering on the bed.

In the meantime, back in the living room Brother Bowser is philosophizing.

Like I was saying when I was a young fellow I did the same thing.

Why do young fellows drink so much anyway?

Well, it's simple, explains Brother Bowser, how is a fellow goin to know how much he can drink if he don't know how much he can't drink?

Everybody laughs.

When Brother Washington and Brother Percy come back in the front room, everybody wants to know how Brother Trinity is doing.

Miss Maybell is gonna bring him a nice cold towel, Mr Percy says, just give him a few moments alone and he's going to be as good as new.

Trinity shuffles into the living room subdued and downcast. He goes over and stares out of the window, down in the street a bus pulls up and a man with bad feet gets off. Sister Washington brings over a chair and sets it gently by him and then leaves him to himself.

All the evil song seems to be gone out of him. But didn't he just have his first taste of fulfilling his ambition? Didn't he just look into his future? Hadn't he just seen his destiny a few moments ago? Nonetheless, Trinity isn't rejoicing, instead he sighs . . .

I'm miserable, I don't like it! I DON'T LIKE BEING MEAN!

The discovery comes like a thunder-bolt. He sinks into the chair, staring into space.

Miss Maybell is in the kitchen humming to herself. She has just interrupted working on her batter to get herself a towel out

of the cupboard. She goes over to the sink and wets it and wrings it out and leaves the kitchen with it. She crosses the middle room in the direction of the living room and notices Earnestine lying across the bed.

Earnestine? Why, child, what are you doing in here? Now, honey, is that nice leaving your guests all alone? Miss Maybell bullies playfully, she leans over Earnestine and only then notices something is wrong. Child, child, what's the matter?

Earnestine raises her head and tries to speak but she just bursts into tears again.

Now, Earnestine, what is it, sugar? Miss Maybell sits down beside Earnestine.

He -Auntie, Trinity . . . he, he . . .

Trinity . . . you say Trinity? What about him? Miss Maybell gets up and pats Earnestine gently on the shoulder.

Humph, there, there, child, don't you cry anymore. Miss Maybell marches into the living room. Trinity hasn't budged, he is still sitting forlornly in his chair in front of the window staring off into space, (but the rest of the party is going fine). Miss Maybell folds the towel and plops it over the front of Trinity's head with an extra firm splat. Trinity groans but doesn't move. Miss Maybell nods to herself and looks for a free chair. She puts it beside Trinity's and sits down.

What did you do to Earnestine? Trinity groans.

What did you do to that child? What she crying for? Don't go giving me no excuses, neither, I'm sure she aint done nothing bad to you, she's one of the sweetest children ever walked!

Trinity says that there's no excuse, that he's just a hundred percent absolutely no good.

Well, I wouldn't say all that, Miss Maybell says, softening a little.

He tells her what he's done and stares forlornly out the window. Miss Maybell gently rearranges the towel on his forehead and says that well maybe all that liquor he drank so fast just had him feeling bad.

No, says Trinity sadly, it wasn't that. I was just mean. I guess I'm no good, there was something in me that made me want to be mean. I guess you couldn't understand that.

Lord, Lord, Miss Maybell laughs, anybody can understand that . . . though a lot of folks won't go admitting it. But everybody gets the Devil in them sometimes.

THE DEVIL! Trinity leaps like he's just been given a hotfoot.

Sure, the Devil, always trying to make being mean seem like so much fun, but it aint fun, not really, now is it?

No, not really . . . not after a second . . . it seems like it's going to be fun, but it's not.

Of course it's not, not to no halfway decent person . . . you gotta fight with the Devil and watch out for his tricks! Miss Maybell takes the towel off his head and gets up. How do you feel now, Trinity?

I . . . I feel fine, thank you very much. I'm sorry about what I said to Earnestine.

I believe you, but dont tell me . . . tell her. Miss Maybell gives him a pat on the shoulder and tips silently through the middle room back to her kitchen.

Trinity hesitates a moment, then he gets up and goes to the curtain separating the middle room from the front and gingerly pulls it back a crack and peeks in. Earnestine is lying curled up on the bed. He sticks his head inside the room, a beam of light from the party comes through the parted curtains and touches the foot of the bed. He calls softly to Earnestine, but there's no answer. He calls her again.

Earnestine, please . . . Earnestine, I liked the sandwich . . . Earnestine, please . . .

Go away! her voice is half-muffled inside her handkerchief, please go away!

Trinity turns back into the living room, and goes to the refreshment table and picks up a sandwich. He parts the curtains and

approaches the bed. The curtain closes behind him and the room draws back into semidarkness.

Earnestine, I'm sorry, he says and takes a huge bite out of the sandwich. Look, look, I'll prove I like it.

No, no, you don't have to do that, you'll make yourself sick, Earnestine says, sitting up.

Trinity sits down next to her. You're too late, I've already been sick.

He takes another big bite from his sandwich and he munches supervigorously, telling her about how he has plenty of room once again. He starts to take another bite when suddenly he gives an enormous belch.

Earnestine, I'm sorry, it wasn't my fault . . . I mean it wasn't your fault . . . I mean it wasn't the sandwich . . . I mean, well, you believe me, don't you?

Oh, Trinity, I believe you! Earnestine puts her hands down, she is laughing . . . they laugh together.

You don't h . . .

SS sss hh HHH . . . You mustn't interrupt while I'm eating, it's bad for the digestion.

You didn't have to eat it, I believe you, Earnestine says, touched.

I wanted to. It was delicious, Earnestine. I liked it . . . I like you too.

You don't have to say that, Trinity.

I mean it. Look, I'm sorry about how I acted and everything, please forgive me.

I forgive you . . .

Suddenly they are there next to each other, all alone in the universe. Far far far away somewhere maybe there is a living room with guests and a kitchen with an Auntie. Their hands sort of touch . . .

Trinity says it's funny how some little something that you don't get to do can grow on you. He goes on mumbling half to her and half to himself, how you can keep not having something until you get so you think that's what you want more than anything else in the world, until you think that's all you want in the world, until you think that's all you ever wanted. He laughs a little and asks if she gets what he means when he hasn't even got it all worked out himself. She nods.

I used to want to be alone so bad I could have bust, says Earnestine.

I had sisters and brothers everywhere. I guess I could have grown up to be a lady hermit, but one day somebody, I forget who now, taught me how to make a tent in the bed with covers or coats or anything like that.

Excited by the memory, Earnestine hops to her feet and pulls Trinity off the bed. She demonstrates how to make a tent, she stretches a line from the post at the head of the bed to the post at the foot and then drapes the clothing of the guests over the cord for a roof.

There . . . there, says Earnestine gaily, putting on some finishing touches. She crawls in and pokes her head out. Seclusion, plus . . . a private world!

Their eyes meet.

Earnestine, Trinity asks softly, could it be a private world for two?

They look at each other as best they can in the semidarkness. I suppose it could, whispers Earnestine and retreats inside the tent. Trinity crawls in beside her.

Miss Maybell picks up the bowl with the batter, dumps the dough on the kitchen table and begins to knead it with her hands, Earnestine stands peeping at her through the middle room doors hesitating. Finally she comes in.

Auntie, she begins, and falters. Miss Maybell turns around. Why, child, I didn't hear you com . . . Miss Maybell stops in

mid-word. She takes a long look at Earnestine and sums up every thing . . . everything. Earnestine fidgets, but Miss Maybell just smiles and nods with the wisdom of age. Then Earnestine starts jabbering a mile a minute . . .

NO, NO, CHILD, un, un, Miss Maybell says, studying her niece, it don't make no difference.

I don't really even know him . . . I . . .

I expect your heart knows him, child, Miss Maybell explains kindly, and that's what matters.

Earnestine starts talking about people talking or figuring or saying . . . Miss Maybell comes over to Earnestine and gives her a hug and tells her whatever she does, to know her own heart, to listen to that first.

Earnestine looks confused.

There aint much happiness in the world, child, explains Miss Maybell gently, and if you and him managed to grab a little of it, if you and him were happy, really happy, count yourself as having a lucky day. She kisses her nice on the cheek and sings for her . . .

FOLKS WILL TELL YOU TO LIVE ONE WAY
JUST WATCH -THEYLL GO LIVE THE OTHER
DONT TRY TO FOLLOW WHAT EVERYBODYS GOT TO SAY
MOST FREE ADVICE AINT GOOD FOR NOTHING BUT TURNING GRAY
IT MAKES NO DIFFERENCE WHAT PEOPLE SAY UN UN, NAW NAW
IT MAKES NO DIFFERENCE, YOU GO YOUR OWN WAY UN HUM, YES YES
AFTER ITS OVER, PEOPLE ALWAYS GOT A BLUES TO SING
BUT THATS AFTER -START EM OVER AND THEYLL DO THE SAME THING
SOMETIMES YOU MAY GET MIXED UP WITH A NO-GOOD MAN
LOVE HIM WHILE YOU LOVE HIM, LEAVE HIM, AS SOON AS YOU CAN
JUST LIKE A PIG GOT HIS SQUEAL
A WOMAN GOT HER THRILL
JUST LIKE A DOG GOT HIS LICE
A MAN GOT HIS VICE
IT MAKES NO DIFFERENCE . . . BACK-BITERS WERE HERE WHEN YOU GOT HERE
IT MAKES NO DIFFERENCE . . . BACK-BITERS WILL BE HERE WHEN YOU GONE

Up front the record player is blasting away and the guests have formed a circle and are taking turns dancing in the middle of the room. Trinity is part of the circle too, clapping and yelling with the rest. He hasn't even put his coat back on, he is in his shirt sleeves and he's a changed young man. Somehow, before, he never really seemed to belong, but now he seems right at home, he claps and yells with everybody else.

Brother Bowser is the last guest in the circle and when he's done his stuff Trinity starts to dance, he is more like an acrobat than a dancer but what he lacks in skill he more than makes up in enthusiasm. Everybody roars and yells encouragement.

DO IT!

WORK OUT, BROTHER TRINITY!

THAT'S IT, SON . . . THAT'S IT!

The record hits a bad grove and begins to repeat itself. Trinity jumps up and down in time to the scratch and everybody laughs. Brother Percy goes over to change it. Trinity spots Earnestine, she has just come into the room with a pitcher of lemonade. They move toward each other.

Earnestine, what you gonna have, child? asks Sister Bowser intruding innocently into love's sanctuary. Earnestine says she'd like some of the lemonade she just brought and Trinity says he'll have the same thing. They can't take their eyes off each other.

Well, that's a wise young man, Sister Washington butts in. It didn't take him long to find out how much he can't drink.

That's more than Brother Bowser done ever found out! says Brother Washington.

Everybody laughs, Trinity and Earnestine are holding hands, still locked in their own private little world, still surrounded by a tent.

Brother Percy asks what record the folks would like to hear. Sister Bowser says, anything, just so he picks out something kinda easy so they can catch their breaths.

Lordy, sure sounds like the party is going fine says Miss Maybell, coming into the room. Aint it the truth, Brother Bowser says.

How you all doing? Miss Maybell asks the kids.

It's the most wonderful birthday party anyone ever had! says Earnestine.

It's the most wonderful party in the world, adds Trinity.

They are so happy they hardly know where they are except that they are together and dancing. Earnestine rests her head on Trinity's shoulder, they dance and dance. Now and then she raises her head, but only so they may gaze into each other's eyes.

I hope it never breaks up, whispers Earnestine. I hope it lasts and lasts forever!

It will . . . I'm sure it will, Trinity says.

Just at that very moment a huge shadow crosses on the fireplace wall. It looks almost like an Imp's form, but it was probably just someone dancing past a lamp . . .

Scene 5

5

THERE WASNT BUT ONE THING . . . ON OLE BRERS MIND
QUITTIN TIME
THERE WASNT BUT TWO THINGS . . . ON OLE BRERS MIND
CAP'N'S BOOT . . .
AND QUITTIN TIME
THERE WASNT BUT THREE THINGS . . . ON OLE BRERS MIND
SWEET LUCY
CAP'N'S BOOT . . .
AND QUITTIN TIME
FOUR THINGS WHICH WAS ALWAYS ON HIS MIND
HIS MAMMAS PICTURE
SWEET SWEET LUCY . . . CAP'N'S BOOT
AND QUITTIN TIME
YOU SEE HE WAS A COUNTRY BOY
AND THAT COUNTRY BROTHER WAS ME

Brother Washington is singing his song, the party is in a mellow mood, with everyone sitting in the living room swaying to that old backwoods rhythm . . .

I AINT GONNA QUIT TILL IT GETS TIME
IF THE CAP'N JEST KEEPS HIS BOOTS OFF ME
OH AND IF MY SWEET LUCY JEST DONT LET ME DOWN
AND OH YES OH YES THE SILVER FRAME AINT NEW
OH YES THE PHOTOS TORN
BUT I GOT MY MAMMAS PICTURE TOO

Just as black laughter is more than fun, black moaning and tears are more than just sadness. A moan means so many things, from a battered body lying beside a highway to a long lost marble found behind the galvanized tub come spring . . . or the shriveled old body lying in the satinette-lined casket . . .

I WONDER, I WONDER WHEN I GET TO THE TOP

OF THEM IVORY STEPS ON MY JUDGMENT DAY
WILL HE MEET ME AND EXCHANGE THIS
WORN AND TORN OLD PICTURE AND FRAME
FOR MY OWN SWEET MOTHER
PUT ME IN HER ARMS AND SAY
OH YES PUT ME IN HER ARMS AND SAY
BABY BROTHER ITS QUITTIN TIME

Go on, Brother Washington, sing for the folks. Lay it on out there. Amen . . . and Brother Washington goes on telling the story.

His mamma said . . .

THERES GONNA BE SOME HARD TIMES SON
LIFE IS GONNA PUT SOME GREASE UNDER YOUR FEET SON
BUT ALWAYS REMEMBER MAMMA LOVES YOU SON
AND THE RACE AINT OVER TILL THE LAST INCH IS RUN

Oh yes and hes got her picture too. His sidekick says . . .

OH HAVE ANOTHER DRINK THERE BUDDY
ITS GOOD FOR WHAT AILS
OH HAVE ANOTHER SWIG THERE GOOD BUDDY
ITS SO GOOD FOR WHAT AILS
OH MY SWEET LUCY

The foreman said . . .

WAKE UP WAKE UP YOU BOYS
THE WORK AINT HARD
AND THE BOSS AINT MEAN
WAKE UP WAKE UP YOU BOYS
THE WORK AINT HARD
AND THE BOSS AINT MEAN

Four, yessir, four things on his mind, his mamma's picture, sweet sweet Lucy, Cap'n's boots and quittin time . . .

Brother Washington leans back, looks to heaven, and asks the Lord that big question from the depth of his black soul . . .

LORD IS IT EVER GONNA BE QUITTIN TIME
LORD AINT IT EVER GONNA BE QUITTIN TIME
LORD . . .

The doorbell rings before Brother Washington can ask the Lord for the third time and the spell is broken and he stops singing.

Someone asks who the devil that could be. Miss Maybell says it's probably the Johnsons. Everybody groans.

Well, Miss Maybell defends herself, I thought it would be nice for Earnestine, 'cause they got a son just around her age . . . goes to college too.

The boy here, Brother Percy points to Trinity, doesn't look like he's been shaving too long.

Didn't know he was coming, Miss Maybell smiles to Trinity, mighty glad to have you, though.

To face the Johnsons' music, Brother Percy gets up and puts a little kick in his drink. Miss Maybell notices.

Now, sugarplum, be careful how much you drink.

You don't mean Brother Percy will drink so much he'll be going and getting drunk on us, do you? teases Brother Bowser.

Naw he's too old for that, says Miss Maybell. He don't get drunk. He just gets sleepy! Everybody laughs.

The doorbell rings again. Miss Maybell crosses the middle room, yelling that she's coming, she's coming.

Trinity asks Mister Washington if he's going to sing anymore. Brother Washington says he don't think he will. Sister Bowser explains to Trinity that the Johnsons figure they too high class for that good old countrified kind of music Brother Percy sings . . . Everybody says he sure has hit the nail on the head.

You shouldn't say that, Earnestine protests, that's mean . . . In the kitchen Miss Maybell starts undoing the locks on the outside door. She begins at the top and methodically works her way down -first the alarm, then the chain.

We aint speaking mean, child, we speaking the truth, Brother Bowser explains . . . Over in the kitchen Miss Maybell lifts off the crossbar and starts on the padlock.

But then, come to think of it, sometimes the truth can be mighty mean . . .

The guests all laugh. Last but not least Miss Maybell undoes the police lock, disconnects the brace and opens the outside door.

Mr' and Mrs' Johnson, followed by Harold, their son, march into the kitchen. They are stiff and snotty and it is clear that they like to think of themselves as regal. Miss Maybell greets them and tells them how their boy has grown since the last time she's seen him.

Yes, this is our offspring, says Mrs' Johnson, our young collegette . . . er collegeous . . . er . . . er . . . our young college man!

Ah, I guess we're a wee bit tardy, says Mr' Johnson. He takes a cigar out of his pocket, ceremoniously snipping the end before shoving it into his big mouth, . . . he clears his throat, trying to be very dignified.

That's all right, says Miss Maybell. Mrs' Johnson hints coquettishly that she must have been worried about them. I bet you thought we weren't coming!

I didn't think about it too much. I asked you and Lord knows that's all I could do . . . after that it's out of my hands, aint that right? Anyhow, I sorta figured you'd be late.

Mrs' Johnson is clearly let down by this answer but Miss Maybell doesn't seem to notice and turns and leads them into the living room. Everybody there is seated except Brother Percy, who is standing by the phonograph getting ready to put on a record. When the Johnsons come in, Trinity, Earnestine, Brother Bowser and Brother Washington stand up. However, Brothers Washington and Bowser are only minimally polite. Their heads hardly rise and their bottoms hardly lift from the seats. In fact it happens so fast if you blink you missed it.

Abruptly the Johnsons turn to Trinity, a new someone to impress. That's a very distinguished name gushes Mrs' Johnson. Harold our young . . . er . . . college man, our son, is middle-named Stanislaus.

Trinity is at a loss for words. Um . . . that's nice . . . he ventures.

The Washington, the Bowsers, Miss Maybell and Brother Percy have now moved to the end of the room near the phonograph and all are quietly laughing and talking among themselves. Trinity is cornered by the Johnsons at one side of the refreshment table and Earnestine and Harold are talking on the other side of the table.

The Johnsons are trying to impress Trinity with what they consider their style and class. Trinity is trying to be polite to them though his attention and heart are with Earnestine. Earnestine is trying to impress Harold with her sophistication and charm and at the same time trying to impress Trinity with her desirability to other men.

Earnestine and Trinity give each other glances from time to time but they are different looks. He is trying to catch her eye whereas she is trying to watch him without his knowing it . . . to check what effect her femme fatale number is having on him.

Oh Harold, how funny, ha ha ha, Earnestine giggles flirtatiously.

Trinity's head is swiveling like he's some miserable weathervane. One minute his ears ring with Earnestine's fickle laughter at everything Harold says and the next moment his ears buzz with the Johnsons' chatter as they do their big shot number on

him.

Miss Maybell is a lovely person, isn't she? Mr' Johnson says to Trinity, such a warm hearted person . . BUZZ

I think she's great, answers Trinity sincerely, he is barely following the conversation though, because his ears are ringing with Earnestine's voice.

It sounds very exciting, but you must work very hard too. Earnestine looks up at Harold with wide eyes. RING

Yes, yes, for her . . . type of person, very lovely, lovely. Mr' Johnson agrees condescendingly and clears his throat again. BUZZ BUZZ

Oh, Harold, ha . . . ha . . . really, do you really thinks so? RING

I suppose we should try and eat a little something. We don't want to give anybody offense, don't you thinks so, Trinity? BUZZ BUZZ

No, we wouldn't want to give anybody offense, chimes in Mrs' Johnson through her tight lips, you're perfectly right dear, we should try to eat a little something anyway. Whereupon she dives at the snack table like a crazed chicken hawk, skinny claws pitchforking snacks into her beak till her cheeks puff out.

Maybe get a little something to drink too, Mr' Chicken Hawk suggests and attacks a fifth of whiskey, puffing expansively on his cigar. A man can't live . . . ha ha, by bread alone, they say.

Trinity strains to smile . . . Ha, ha. Earnestine's laughter and the Johnsons' buzzing weave together. No, I guess you're right, man doesn't live by bread alone . . .

I'll just sample a bit of these snacks, says Mrs' Johnson, gulping down two more sandwiches.

Mr' Johnson asks Trinity what'll he have to drink.

Lemonade, please.

Lemonade? Come on, Trinity, you're a big boy now, guffaws Mr' Johnson. Let me fix it. Just then Mr' Percy puts on a record and Trinity quickly excuses himself and dashes to Earnestine.

Will you dance with me, Earnestine?

I'm the hostess, she answers, louder than necessary, haughtily tossing her head. I have to make the other guests feel at home, too. She holds her arms up to Harold and they start to dance. Harold gives a tough-luck-old-chap nod to Trinity. Earnestine's voice doesn't even sound like her voice, it sounds more like an Imp or something but then again, if you aint got ripoff in your heart the devil can't rip you off.

I'll just fix the young man's drink for him, Mister Johnson says and the whiskey bottle flashes again.

Here is your drink, Trinity! Mr' Johnson has mixed some whiskey in with the lemonade . . . Trinity takes a sip and longingly watches Earnestine with Harold.

May we ask what kind of work you do? asks Mrs' Johnson.

Myself, Mr' Johnson puffs expansively on his cigar, I work for the goverment.

Trinity says he's, well, he's changing his occupation. Mr' Johnson is insistent, what did Trinity do before? Trinity says he was in the breaking business. That seems like a good profession to Mrs' Johnson, she comments that no sooner than they put up a building seems like they're tearing it down again.

Brother Percy beckons Trinity to come over. Trinity excuses himself and goes over to Brother Percy.

I didn't want anything particular, son, says Brother Percy, but I figured you could kinda do with a rest. Them is the nosiest people in the world.

Mr' Johnson works for the goverment, says Trinity.

Aint it the truth, says Brother Bowser. Lord, Lord, works for the goverment, yeah, HE SURE DO, he's a mail clerk, just like Brother Percy, Lordy.

Brother Percy puts on another record. Trinity rushes over to Earnestine again, he asks her if this time it's his turn. Earnestine says in that other voice that he shouldn't be that way, that Harold has to catch up a little. Everybody is now tripping the light fantastic except Trinity . . . Miss Maybell with Brother Percy and the couples with each other. Trinity stands by the record player watching, trying to keep a stiff upper lip.

Steer over toward the refreshment table, says Mrs' Johnson, her words muffled by a mouthful of sandwich she is already gobbling.

Brother Trinity seems a little down, Brother Washington says to his rib.

Honey, says Brother Percy to Miss Maybell, don't Earnestine seem to be acting a little strange to you?

Let's see, men are in fraternities and I would be in a sorority, is that right, Harold? Ha Ha Ha . . . RING

They don't seem too uppity about the refreshment table, do they? says Sister Bowser to her husband.

Aint it the truth!

Why don't you pick out the next record, Brother Trinity? suggests Brother Percy as the music draws to a close.

Righto! Trinity tries to sound enthusiastic. He grabs a record as fast as he can and hands it to Brother Percy and dashes over to Earnestine but she is already in Harold's arms.

Trinity says modestly he thought this one would surely be his. They say thinking is bad for the brain.

Besides, no monopolies allowed, tosses Earnestine gaily.

Hey, son. Trinity turns around. It's Miss Maybell.

If you don't think I'm too old and feeble, how about giving me a spin? Trinity says he'd love it and they start dancing, but he still can't take his eyes off Earnestine and he keeps looking longingly over his shoulder at her.

Son, are you dancing with me, teases Miss Maybell gently, or is you dancing with them?

Trinity says he's sorry, Miss Maybell says it's all right, she understands, but he has got to try to understand too that Earnestine just wants to be a good hostess and put the Johnsons at ease since they came late. Do you really think so? asks Trinity, looking somewhat encouraged . . . Sure, sure, Miss Maybell says. Trinity tells her that he feels much better and that it's the most wonderful party in the world, he loves it . . . the people, her apartment, everything!

I gotta admit myself, our little get-togethers on Saturday night every now and then can be very nice, says Miss Maybell, but you're wrong about the apartment though. Ha, you sure is wrong there, the light is sorta low and you can't see all the cracks in the walls.

A little crack in a wall here and there isn't so bad, says Trinity tactfully.

You just ain't seen them bugs that come marching out of them cracks, says Miss Maybell, man, you got to fight them all the time. I gotta have this place de-bugized three times a year or them rascals will take over the place. Lord, Lord, life sure is something, ain't it . . . You call this dancing, . . . Come on now, she urges, let's ball 'em back! and Miss Maybell starts cutting loose. Trinity is caught up and forgets his cares and begins to let her rip almost as if he had been black from the get go.

Don't go wearing that young man down to a frazzle, yells Sister Washington.

All the guests laugh at the new couple and shout. Miss Maybell and Trinity get down to serious dancing business and really ball 'em back to the very end of the record.

Trinity thanks her for the dance, she says she loved it too but now she's gotta go back to the kitchen and for the guests to

clean up the snack table because dinner is still gonna be a little while.

Come on, Harold, you haven't had hardly anything at all, says Earnestine in a loud voice, and drags him to the refreshment table.

At the doorway of the middle room, Miss Maybell turns around and asks Earnestine to come give her a hand. Earnestine says she'll be right there. Miss Maybell is leaning over the table kneading the dough into a ball with her hands when Earnestine comes in.

Here I am, Auntie! Earnestine is radiant.

Shut the door, sugar. Miss Maybell doesn't lift her eyes from her work. Earnestine shuts the door. Miss Maybell turns toward her and gently says, Earnestine, why you acting so funny all of a sudden?

I don't understand, Auntie, I'm not acting any different.

LORD! From the corner of her eye, Miss Maybell sees a cockroach strutting along the edge of the table. Just look at that, aint that old devil got some nerve! I'll fix him.

She dashes over to the sink and snatches a bundle of newspaper rolled up like a club and tied together with bits of string from a hook on the wall and runs back to the table.

Where is he? There he is! WHACK, Miss Maybell annihilates him with her club. There he WAS! She wipes the table with a napkin. When I gets my Old Smasher out, they got to go! Yessir.

Miss Maybell turns around and asks Earnestine again why she's acting so funny all of a sudden.

In the living room, Mrs' Johnson is saying, as she stuffs down another sandwich, that she usually can't eat in the evening, but perhaps just a little bit would be all right . . .

In the kitchen Earnestine is being a hypocrite too, protesting that she can't understand what Auntie's talking about and that she isn't acting different or anything.

Sugar, turn the oven up to three-seventy-five, Miss Maybell tells her. Earnestine bends over and Miss Maybell whacks her one across the rear with Old Smasher. Earnestine leaps up, shocked and stinging.

Don't you lie in this house! Miss Maybell explodes. You don't understand what I'm talking about! she mimics. You sure do understand what I'm talking about! There's enough lying going on in the world without you dragging it in here! A little while ago you come right here in this kitchen all starry-eyed about that boy Trinity, then suddenly you start treating him like he was dirt. Maybe you done started liking that Johnson boy, but you aint even passing polite to that other boy . . . I know your mother raised you better than that. Is you that fickle-minded, child?

Miss Maybell is cooling off a little. I don't want you to think I'm mixing up in your business . . . you don't never have to tell me nothing, but just don't go telling me no lies, do you hear? It ain't necessary. First you just start out lying to other folks, but it don't usually stop there. Before you know it you start lying to yourself too.

Earnestine, shamefaced, says she's sorry and she won't do it again. They hug each other and Miss Maybell tells her she's a good girl.

I aint gonna lie though, it don't make me too happy to see you trying to jump from fellow to fellow.

It's Trinity I care about, says Earnestine in a shocked voice, not Harold!

Well, you got a funny way of showing it.

Earnestine replies that a girl's got to be modern and high class. Miss Maybell tells her there aint nothing so modern about treating somebody like dirt. Earnestine runs into the middle room, gets down on her knees and fishes out a stack of magazines from under her bed and runs back to the kitchen.

Auntie, Earnestine opens a magazine, listen to this!

Child, Miss Maybell says, frowning as she glances at the stack, I already told you I don't think you should be reading them phony white and half-white make-believe magazines so much.

Oh, Auntie! Every week they have a column, "Recipe For Holding Your Mister." Listen . . . "Fry him in the grease of jealousy!" She reads from another magazine, "Baste him with the juice of his uncertainty."

Sounds more like you're talking about a leg of lamb to me, Miss Maybell comments.

"Sprinkle him with spicy doubt."

Maybe the folks that writes them things is cannibals, throws in Miss Maybell.

Earnestine says that her Auntie just doesn't understand. That she's just testing Trinity.

Maybe, child, maybe . . . what kinda love them magazines been teaching you though, I wonder, that say making somebody miserable is a good test for love.

Truth is a bitch . . . Truth is still the best comeback there is and Earnestine doesn't have an answer.

Don't go minding me, child, Miss Maybell sighs, you'll learn . . . oh yes you'll learn . . . you can lead the horse to the water, like the old folks say, but he aint gonna drink till he's ready, good and ready. Maybe I'm old-fashioned, but that stuff you talking aint all that new as them magazines there want you to think. I aint never held no man by jerking him around like he was some fish on a string. Don't think I'd want no man like that either. Think about what I'm telling you, honey, if he don't love you for yourself, well, he just don't love you.

I just wanted to test him, insists Earnestine . . . Miss Maybell finishes putting the dough in the pan.

Now understand me good, child, you do just what you want . . . but as far as I'm concerned, you just begging for the Devil!

Miss Maybell bends over and opens the oven. Just then there is a flash of light, a puff of smoke, and a rattle of thunder. Earnestine screams.

Miss Maybell jerks up. David is standing just inside the outside door on the very spot where Trinity appeared before. He is sporting a crushed velvet suit, and his hair is conked.

LORDY, LORD, says Miss Maybell, I sure gotta get that lock fixed first thing Monday morning!

Scene 6

6

Trinity, Trinity, Earnestine calls, opening the curtain into the middle room. Trinity is at the other end of the living room with Brother Percy and the phonograph.

I've got a surprise for you, she says, trying to imitate what she thinks is the appropriate voice, some kind of strange tone she must have picked up from one of those historical movies about life at the court of such and such a king. Here . . . here is a friend of yours.

TRINITY! David steps into the room and flings his arms wide open. I just knew it was you when I noticed you walking into this building. I thought I'd never find you. WHAT LUCK! David crosses the room with huge strides . . . huge for him anyway, since he is on the small side . . . He throws himself into Trinity's arms and hugs him like an uncle who has just stumbled upon a long-lost nephew. In the flesh, David is pushing fifty, just about the same age as Miss Maybell and the other guests. Generally, when an Imp borrows human form he takes the age he was at when he signed with the Devil.

David holds Trinity at arm's length, then give him another big squeeze and whispers, Hug me back, stupid. David says dropping his voice.

Why did you come? Trinity whispers, obediently hugging him back.

JUST THINK . . . after all these years! David shouts for the benefit of the guests who are standing around beaming at them, but out of the corner of his mouth he whispers, What do you think? Break that party! . . . Don't worry, I'm here now, we'll

break it up in nothing flat.

David holds Trinity at arm's length again. What a coincidence, he bellows, using his loud, for-the-guests'-benefit voice. Sure was a coincidence, Trinity bellows back, using the same for-the-guests' volume. It's a touching scene, they're even dressed in the same colors, red and black. Sister Washington is very moved, she thinks it sure is fine to see folks you aint seen, just by accident, after so long. Brother Bowser says aint it the truth. Sister Bowser welcomes David to the party and asks Brother Percy to put on a record. Old buddy or not, as soon as the music starts, Trinity untangles himself from David and rushes over to Earnestine. David and Harold follow right on his heels.

How about this dance, Earnestine? Remember, you . . .

Mademoiselle, David breaks suavely in on Trinity, may I please have the honor?

Earnestine? Harold interrupts them both, holding out his hand with supreme assurance.

Earnestine looks very flirtatiously at each one in turn. I would adore, I would just love to dance with you, she says finally. Each of the three assumes it is him she is speaking to and they all move forward . . . BUT, Earnestine pauses dramatically, as much as she would love to, she can't, she simply must go help Auntie, too-de-loo, auree voirr . . . and she flits out of the room.

Don't we know you? asks Mr' Johnson, studying David. Something about you seems very familiar.

Hhmmmm, I suppose it would, David says, giving Mr' Johnson a long penetrating look and recognizing a fellow asshole.

I work for the government, Mr' Johnson flourishes his cigar, what kind of business you in?

We're in the same business, David says. He turns away and throws his arm around Trinity's shoulder. But before he can get into any more party-pooping intrigue, Brother Percy drags him away to meet the rest of the folks.

Come on, Brother David, afterward you and Brother Trinity can have yourselves a little talk. I reckon you got a lot to talk about.

Ha haha . . . Yes, sir, David guffaws and nudges Trinity with his elbow, we've got a lot of talking to do.

Earnestine is sitting on the bed leafing through one of those phony magazines by the dim light of the overhead bulb. . . . She dreams she is the hostess on an enormous yacht, the war of the sexes is over and all men are automatically charming and don't have to be teased or bullied. She knows how to swim, and so she isn't afraid of standing near the railing. The ship is somewhere near a place like Tahiti, there's a full moon and a light breeze. Trinity paddles out to her yacht in a canoe. He takes the necklace of flowers he is wearing and tosses it to her. She sings to him sort of semi a la Juliet, and her song begins with a beautiful operatic arpeggio . . .

AAAAAHHHAAA
MY MAN MY MAN MY MAN
AAAAAHHHAAA
OH YEAH
OH AINT IT GRAND
WHEN HE SMILES IM ALL A FLUTTER
WHEN HE GRINS MY KNEES TURN TO BUTTER
AAAAAHHHAAA
SAFE IN HIS ARMS FOREVER
FAR FROM ALL HARM FOREVER
TWO HEARTS FLYING
TWO HEARTS FOREVER
MY MAN
OH AINT LOVE GRAND
AAAAAHHHAAAAAA

While Earnestine's ship swings at anchor in the coral lagoon, Brother Bowser is just finishing introducing everyone to David.

And last but not least, this here is Brother Bowser.

Brother Bowser says that any friend of Brother Trinity is a friend of his. Sister Washington says she imagines they must be old friends from down home.

Yes, from way down home, David says, snickering.

While the folks laugh at the part of the joke they understand, David steers Trinity aside for a little head-to-head.

Well, how is the family doing? David asks, using his loud for-the-benefit-of-the-guests voice. Then he whispers, What's taken you so long? I could have broken up two parties by now.

Everybody's just fine, thank you, answers Trinity, in a loud voice, then in a whisper, Well, why didn't you come with me in the first place?

Behind them the party goes on its merry way, with the guests dancing and milling around.

What happened? David insists.

What do you mean, what happened? Trinity raises his voice in exasperation then catches himself. First, they didn't get scared when I made faces . . . second and third, there's enough stuff to eat and drink here for an army, and last, the records don't break!

There's more than four ways to skin a cat, sneers David. Let's break this party . . . Come on, try and think of something . . .

There is a pause . . . They stand with their backs to the party and their heads down. Slowly Trinity looks up.

David . . .

Got an idea? David asks eagerly.

Trinity tells him hesitantly that he's decided he doesn't want to break the party. David is flabbergasted.

You're joking, whatta ya mean you don't wanna break up the party? David hisses. Mean, meanness, think, think, have you forgotten why you offered your soul to the Devil? And this is just the beginning. Think of all the glorious chances you're going to have to be mean, come on, come on, snap out of it.

It's no use, I tried it, says Trinity. I don't like being mean. I just discovered a little while ago that I don't like being mean . . . And you, are you sure, are you absolutely sure? Maybe you'll be sorry later. Are you really sure?

Ha! . . . I'M SURE!

But maybe you're mistaken, insists Trinity. You never finished telling me why you offered your soul to the Devil.

Why I offered my soul to the Devil? muses David . . . Why I offered my soul to the Devil? David proceeds to open up his heart, becoming positively eloquent.

Even now when I think of it, I cringe with disgust and shame! Not for myself, mind you! But for the decadent, slimy, impure monster that bears society's name. Why I offered my soul to the Devil . . . Do you know what? I'm convinced I had the only solid gold soul, the only heart of pure love, in modern history! Humph . . . I gave my soul to the Devil and I don't regret it!

Trinity tries to reason with David. Didn't his mother love him? David says, yes, but she doesn't count because her love wasn't PURE, it was MATERNAL! . . . Your father? . . . PATERNAL! . . . Trinity asks him if any ladies ever loved him. You bet they did, says David, and they all swore it was ETERNAL, but it wasn't pure . . . Carol loved him because of his eyes, Connie because of his nose, Sandra because he met her on a train, it seems she was crazy about trains . . . Hortense loved his name, Mimi because, well . . . he hesitates demurely, it's a little too personal to say . . . Martha . . .

Wait a minute! says Trinity, now he has him, pure love, pure love is an abstraction, in reality it can't be!

That's the stuff, my boy, you're catching on, you're beginning to see! David gives a demonic smile . . .

Now I get it, says Trinity. But . . . why, that's the whole moral of my case over again . . . I just realized good and bad are mixed in each one of us. Purity, a hundred percent good or a hundred percent bad, is an impossibility!

I can only half agree! Both of our cases only prove . . . now listen closely and try to follow me! Both of our cases only prove that a hundred percent, or purity when applied to GOOD, cannot be! We both tried complete goodness, there's where we failed . . . Don't you get it? . . . Don't you see? . . .

David again flashes his demonic smile, then continues. Positive things, Goodness, Love, et cetera, must have a reason . . . Negative things, Hate, Evil, et cetera, that's something else, Hate doesn't have to see! Hate, glorious Hate, Hate never has a real enough reason! Hate is perverted from the core! In other words, Hate can be One Hundred Percent Pure. Since pure love can't exist, I'll settle for Pure Hate!

David is all fired up by his own words, just as if he were human. He is now really ready to get in there and break up the party, but Trinity still refuses.

You aren't going to help me, hunh, grumbles David. You're going to let the team down, you're going to be chicken?

All right, you win, Trinity says, giving up, let's get out of here . . . Let's go somewhere else, come on, we can't . . .

No, I'll break this one right now! David is furious. He looks around the room . . . Suddenly he sneers a triumphant gleam appears in his eyes.

There's always Evil around . . . Ha . . . I'll break it all by myself! . . . I'm gonna play my trump card, this party is finished, just watch my smoke!

Trinity tries to stop David but David ignores him and slithers off [...] toward [...] the guests. First he makes his way [...] over [...] to the refreshments and picks up a [...] sandwich [...] and a glass . . . Trinity [...] nervously. Then, with his evil yes at half-mast, a drink in his hand and a smirk on his face, David crosses the room and joins Brother Bowser.

How you doing?

Just fine, answers Brother Bowser, just fine, and you?

Poor Brother Bowser, David shakes his head despairingly. Poor old Brother Bowser.

Poor Brother Bowser? How come poor me? Just what is you talking about, Brother David?

Don't you know what's going on? David puts a comforting hand on Brother Bowser's shoulder, no, I guess you don't, poor, tricked guy. Everybody's not honest and trustworthy like me and you, Brother Bowser. I hate to tell you this but I guess you must learn sometime how slimy and rotten this world is!

Brother Bowser is a little puzzled but he agrees that things can be mighty bad sometimes. David says he doesn't know the half of it, and he really hates to tell him, but he, David, is not like the others, so he will tell him, like a true friend . . .

Brother Bowser asks just what is he talking about.

Try not to be too violent, says David. Oh, how I hate to tell you, there's no telling what you might do if, or rather when, you know the truth. Try and keep calm, but if you can't, don't worry, I'll stand behind you whatever you do . . . even . . . if you wreck this place.

Is you gonna say it, or ain't you?

Try and keep calm anyway.

Is you gonna come out with it!

. . . David leans over and spills the beans. Sister Bowser sleeps with Brother Washington!

Brother Bowser doesn't move . . . the record comes to an end, David shoves an empty bottle into his hand.

Go ahead, I'm with you, David says. He turns around and faces the center of the room, going into a semi-street-gang-warfare

crouch à la West Side Story, ready for action, ready for the rumble, ready to jump in as soon as Brother Bowser starts trouble.

Brother Bowser becomes aware of the bottle David has shoved into his hand, and he lifts it over his head . . . Is he gonna go into a jealous frenzy and charge down on Brother Washington, his wife and the rest of the guests? . . . Is he going to slug David from behind? Nope, neither one. He is just checking the bottle against the light to see how much of that good stuff is left inside. He realizes it's empty and he can't figure out why Brother David would hand him an empty bottle, must be a mistake, mistakes do happen, yes Lord. He carries the empty bottle over to the table and exchanges it for a fresher one. In the meantime, David, in his semi-ass-kicking crouch, has grown impatient for the shit to hit the fan. He stands up and turns around just in time to see Brother Bowser approaching with a new bottle and a big smile . . .

He pours himself a drink and refills David's glass too.

I thank you, Brother David, Brother Bowser says cheerfully.

David stands utterly dumbfounded with his jaw flapping in the breeze.

I'm sure your news was meant kindly. Brother Bowser shakes his head. He is unperturbed.

But that news ain't new! Lordy, Lord, that news is mighty old!

Don't you care? Didn't you understand what I said? David raises his voice, hoping to embarrass Brother Bowser. I said your wife is sleeping with somebody else!

Sho, sho, says Brother Bowser, still calm and collected. I understand you all right, Brother David. Anyway, we is what I guess you might call . . . ah . . . ah . . . a quarter separated.

Quarter separated! David is beside himself with frustration, shock, outrage — you name it. You're mocking the laws of our culture, you . . . you're breaking the rules of society . . . you . . . you're . . .

What you getting all upset about society for, anyhow? . . . Some folks who been out in the world look at things different, Brother Bowser explains.

But . . . But . . . He . . . She . . . They . . . David shakes his finger at Brother Bowser's face. The rest of the guests come over to see what the big discussion is about. David is desperate . . . All subtlety flown, he tries frantically to start trouble.

But . . . but . . . he, she, they, any lawbook, for example . . .

Sho, sho, Brother Bowser breaks in gently and pats David on the shoulder to calm him down, I know what the books say, or leastwise, I gotta pretty good idea! The Good Book says THIS, another book says THAT.

Amen, say the guests.

Sometimes they all agree, sometimes don't nobody agree.

Amen, say the guests.

It's interesting and all, I suppose, and I don't mean to be disrespectful, but what all them books say don't make no difference to me!

Amen again, say the guests . . . Right on, Brother Bowser, sho nuff.

Brother Bowser explains to David that he's just a poor man and he had to pick his lessons from the school of living and so he got his rules from the Book of Life. Brother Percy breaks in and asks him if he remembers the song "I Get My Rules from the Book of Life." It was the rage in the thirties and everybody says they remember it.

Brother Percy thinks Miss Maybell still has the record. He finds it and puts it on.

The song begins, everybody sings "The Book of Life" and dances The Unemployment Line, a dance created especially for the song. In a row, they hold out their hands like beggars, squinch their feet the way you have to when it's only your foot muscles keeping your shoes from falling apart, and do a shuffle that's somewhere between a camel walk and a fox trot. The

older guests lead — Trinity, Earnestine and Harold follow as best they can. The Johnsons join in, rather aloofly of course, always trying to maintain what they feel is a proper distance between them and the common herd. The room starts to look like a number from a musical comedy, with David as the counterweight, forced to go along with it, stumbling through the song with a strained grin on his face.

WE PICK UP OUR LESSONS FROM THE SCHOOL OF LIVING
AIN'T AS MANY SAINTS AS THERE USED TO BE
LESSON A
TRY TO OVERLOOK THE NEXT FELLOW
AND I HOPE THE NEXT FELLOW GONNA OVERLOOK ME

Everybody joins in the refrain, and Miss Maybell comes in from the kitchen just in time to sing a verse . . .

MOST OF THE RULES THEY TALK ABOUT [...]IN [...] THEM THICK BOOKS
AIN'T NOTHING BUT WISHFUL THINKING
PEOPLE THINKING ABOUT WHAT THEY [...]WISH [...] WAS TRUE

Everybody sings the refrain again. In the beginning of the Depression when the song first came out and folks thought this big slump was momentary, everybody felt the lyrics were very funny. Later, when the Depression kept lasting, the Man didn't find the song so funny anymore, but instead rather dangerous, and it was eventually censored . . .

WHEN A POOR CHILD IS BORN HES ENROLLED FREE OF CHARGE
AT THE SCHOOL OF HARD TIMES
IN THE COURSE OF REALITY
IN THE CLASS OF OPENED EYES
GRADE SCHOOL AND HIGH SCHOOL IS A COTTON FIELD OR STREET CORNER
SOMEBOODY'S KITCHEN OR SOMEBOODY'S FACTORY
THE UNEMPLOYMENT LINE
SPORTING HOUSE OR JAIL
THE UNIVERSITY
WE'LL STICK WITH PLAIN OLD REALITY
THAT SUITS US
WE'LL STICK WITH PLAIN OLD REALITY
THE ONLY THING A POOR PERSON CAN TRUST
WE PICK UP OUR LESSONS FROM THE SCHOOL OF LIVING
WE GOT OUR RULES FROM THE BOOK OF LIFE

The song ends with a big crescendo, everybody laughs and takes a breather. Brother Washington says to David he don't know why they're telling him all that for. He done lived long enough to surely know all about that himself . . . Sister Washington says sure he knows all that, he's just playing with them. Brother Percy says he sure didn't think this party could get no livelier than it was a little while before, but since Brother David got here it's been jumping even more. Everybody agrees and laughs and congratulates David. Brother Bowser slaps him on the back.

Your friend sure is funny, he sure is a joker! says Brother Bowser to Trinity.

Come on, Trinity, David whispers pleading, help me, come on, you remember . . .

BREAK THAT PARTY
BREAK THAT PARTY
BREAK . . .

Lordy, Lord, exclaims Miss Maybell, breaking in, Ha . . . ha . . . now aint that something, I almost forgot I came up front to tell you all something. The biscuits and rolls are in the oven, so I want you all to clean up that refreshment table, you hear. Soon as that bread gets ready, we'll be sitting down to eat.

Miss Maybell takes a bit of her own advice and picks up a sandwich and the rest of the folks swoop down on the refreshment table. Brother Percy, Trinity and David bring up the rear, Brother Percy gets his reload and drifts back over to the record player, in short, the party continues to roll along. As usual, Mrs' Johnson says she usually just can't eat a thing in the evening, but perhaps a little bit more might stay down. David pulls Trinity over to a corner.

Hear that? whispers David, our time's getting short. It's getting dangerous, you know the rules, we gotta break up the party, or at least get out before it ends or we'll be turned into just what we're pretending to be . . . real human beings!

All right, says Trinity hopelessly, you win, come on, let's get out of here.

No first let's break the party. Break that party. David's words begin to entwine Trinity's will.

Come on, Trinity, help me, come on, break that party, break that party, break . . .

Earnestine trips into the living room . . .

I got a little lonesome, she announces.

Well, child, says Miss Maybell, you just stay up here and enjoy yourself for a while. After all, sugar, it's your party.

One glimpse of Earnestine and the evil old web David is wrapping around Trinity melts away. David's ex-partner deserts him right in the middle of a word and rushes over to Earnestine. David is desperate — Desperate David the Devil and Miss Maybell's eyes cross paths for a moment and she gives him a warm smile, then trots back to her oven. BINGO . . . it's darkest before the dawn. Suddenly, David gets the most brilliant idea in the world, in fact, he gets what he thinks is the most brilliant idea in all the centuries of party breaking since the Devil declared war on people having a good time. He rushes out of the room behind Miss Maybell.

Earnestine, may . . . Trinity starts to ask for a dance.

Harold stops what he's been saying to his parents in the middle of a sentence and rushes over to Earnestine, too, a fraction behind Trinity . . .

Earnestine, shall we dance? Harold breaks in.

Stop . . . stop that, do you hear me, Miss Maybell protests . . .

David has caught her alone in the middle room and ambushed her. They tassel . . . he is trying to put his latest party-pooping plan into effect, he keeps running his hand up her skirt.

Earnestine ignores Trinity completely and steps into Harold's arms.

Hey, it's MY turn, Earnestine, Trinity protests, you said the next one was for me . . .

Well, next one is . . . Earnestine flips back, ha ha . . . ha, she and Harold laugh. They dance away.

Trinity forsakenly watches Earnestine, and the Johnsons disapprovingly watch Harold . . . Miss Maybell escapes from desperate David's naughty hands and dashes into the kitchen.

David is hot on and after her tail . . . DRAT! she is stronger than he figured on . . . back in the living room the record comes to an end. Trinity dashes to Earnestine's side and Mr' Johnson hurries to his college man . . .

Come on over to the refreshment table, son, your mother is freshening up your drink, coaches Mr' Johnson, and besides, I want us to have a little talk . . .

In a moment, Father. Harold turns to Earnestine and proposes she save the next dance for him.

The next one is already promised to me, Trinity asserts.

How about that, Earnestine? asks Harold, full of assurance.

In the kitchen David and Miss Maybell are going around the table. Every time he gets close enough, he pinches her rear. Finally he manages to catch her, they wrestle, she breaks away. She manages to get the table between him and her. They eye each other across the space . . .

Go ahead, GO AHEAD . . . Scream! David urges.

Ain't no need for that! Miss Maybell grabs her broom and takes her toughest Willie Mays stance.

Another record begins, it's a new hot number and Earnestine says she would love to do the dance. Trinity says he'll try his best . . . Earnestine ignores him and turns to Harold and says she bets he can really go on this one. Harold tells her it's his specialty, Earnestine gives him her hand.

But . . . but . . . stammers Trinity.

Would you please mind starting it again, Brother Percy? asks Earnestine, completely ignoring Trinity.

-Be glad to, child. You're the boss, it's your birthday party.

-You promised me! Trinity says.

Don't be so bad-tempered . . .

Back in the kitchen Miss Maybell and David still have the table between them.

You'd better get your business straight, Brother David. You'd better know your business.

I know my business, says David, coming on all sexy. I just wanted a little kiss.

Ha, I'll bet you did! Miss Maybell starts to soften and lowers the broom a little. Lordy, Lord, you sure is hot-blooded, aint you!

I like you, protests David, I can't help that.

Well, I can sure see you aint no good, but I gotta admit I like you too. She blushes and puts the broom down, but I still gotta take care of my cooking, so you just go right on back up front there while I look after my bread in the oven.

The hot new record begins again. Trinity stands up for himself . . .

Earnestine, you promised me.

Do you want to wreck my party? Earnestine snaps. Don't be so mean!

MEAN! Trinity is stung. He learns the world hasn't turned over a new leaf just because he has. No sir, he doesn't have a monopoly, it seems, on being naughty. Earnestine and Harold start dancing, the guests begin to clap and mage a semicircle around them, they are a terrific dance team. David comes back into the living room, he takes it all in — the guests clapping, Earnestine shaking her fanny to the music, Harold grinning down at her, Trinity standing off in a corner with his hands balled into fists. A smile spreads over David's face . . . things are starting to go his way after all, one man's negative is another guy's positive, trouble is only opportunity in work clothes, etc', so they say.

Scene 7

7

A party is made up of people, and people are people, dreamers, schemers, and every bigot don't wear a sheet or have that tint either . . .

Take dreams for example . . .

La de dah, Earnestine sings as she gathers dishes from the cabinet and sets the table. She thinks of her Trinity, how wonderfully he passes each test she puts his heart to. He's jealous, so he must care and he's angry, so he must be hers. She just knows he would slay dragons for her, anything. She sings . . .

MY MAN MY MAN MY MAN

Miss Maybell is doing a little dreaming too, she thinks about that natty Brother David as she putters around preparing the food . . .

HE AINT NO GOOD, HE AINT NO GOOD
HE AINT NO GOOD, BUT THATS ALL RIGHT WITH ME
HE MAKES ME ITCH, SO IM GOING TO LET HIM SCRATCH
HE AINT NO GOOD
BUT I BET HE KNOWS HIS BUSINESS
SO HES ALL RIGHT WITH ME

People have their prejudices, too . . . and sitting on the bed in the middle room, Mr' Johnson is revealing and passing one of his on to his son, in that same old chant of superiority and hate . . .

SON YOU GOT A BIG FUTURE IN FRONT OF YOU
I KNOW YOURE NOT THINKING NOTHING SERIOUS
BUT ANYHOW LISTEN YOU FORGET HER THIS MINUTE
BELIEVE ME YOU AINT EVEN GOT A SECOND FOR ANYBODY LIKE THAT
THESE FOLKS IS NICE, BUT THEYRE COMMON
SHE AINT EVEN HALF GOOD ENOUGH FOR YOU
SON YOU GOT A BIG FUTURE IN FRONT OF YOU
YOU GOT SUCCESS WRITTEN ALL OVER YOU

In the front room Mrs' Johnson's thoughts mingle with her spouses as she reflects on the shame to the family name and how the scandal would be the death of her poor husband.

YOU'RE KILLING YOUR FATHER AND YOU'RE KILLING ME

Mr' Johnson's sentiments are in the same vein, how often self-interest is [...] in altruism.

YOU'RE KILLING YOUR MOTHER AND YOU'RE KILLING ME

Sometimes Imps act a lot like some people too. Sometimes it's hard to tell who is who. In the farthest corner of the living room, David is doing a number on Trinity to get him to do what he wants him to . . . the same old tune of you need me, I sure look out for you . . .

SEE SEE SEE
I COULD HAVE TOLD YOU
YOURE LUCKY YOUE GOT A PAL LIKE ME
A MINUTE AGO YOU WERE EVEN
CONSIDERING
LETTING YOURSELF TURN BACK INTO A
HUMAN BEING
I TOLD YOU PEOPLE ARE ROTTEN
MEAN HUNH? THATS WHAT SHE CALLED YOU
COME ON COME ON COME ON
LETS SHOW EM WHAT IT REALLY IS TO
BE MEAN
BREAK THAT PARTY
BREAK THAT PARTY

Shakespeare said life isn't anything but a stage . . . life is a melody with a drummer that keeps the beat going off in all sorts of directions. In four different corners of the apartment, Earnestine, Miss Maybell, the Johnsons, and David and Trinity sing their songs, in counterpoint with one another. The tunes rise to the Saturday night sky all mixed and blending just like life itself, sometimes one thing coming through stronger, sometimes another . . .

BREAK THAT PARTY
IF YOU SHAKE THE TREE PICK UP THE
FRUIT
IF YOU TALK ABOUT A TRIP BE READY
TO GO
IF YOU SIT ON EGGS THEY JUST MIGHT
HATCH

IF YOU MAKE ME ITCH BE READY TO
SCRATCH
WHEN HE SMILES IM ALL A FLUTTER
SHE ISNT EVEN HALF YOUR EQUAL
HE AINT NO GOOD BUT THATS ALL RIGHT
WITH ME
SMASH THAT PARTY
I GOT A BIG FUTURE A BIG FUTURE
MEAN HUNH? SHE CALLED YOU MEAN
YEAH SHE CALLED ME MEAN
OH AINT LOVE GRAND
YOUVE GOT THE NAME WHY NOT THE GAME
YEAH WHY NOT THE GAME

Mr' Johnson finishes his lecture, puts an arm around Harold's shoulder and they rise and head for the living room.

Earnestine finishes setting the table and singing her song and heads [...]toward[...] the living room. Miss Maybell [...]finishes [...] her song too and checks the [...]oven [...]. By now David has Trinity's mind [...]turned [...] around his way, he hands him a [...]bottle [...] and they are about to pass into [...]action [...]. Just then, Mr' Johnson and his [...]son [...] come back into the living room . . .

Let's start with Harold, Trinity [...]says [...], squeezing his bottle. They [...]start [...] to close in for the kill but just then Earnestine walks in and Trinity goes all mushy and falters and sets his bottle down.

Come on, Trinity, David encourages, let's . . .

Look who's back, exclaims Sister Bowser happily, I guess things are about ready in the kitchen, put a record on the machine, Brother Percy, so we can get some dancing in.

I got one all ready. He starts the phonograph.

Oooh, that's it, that's my song, moans Sister Washington, it's her song again. Earnestine agrees that it's a lovely song . . .

Come on. Trinity! whispers David.

The Johnsons, Trinity, David and Earnestine are standing in a loose group. Earnestine smiles at Trinity. As always, he gobbles the bait and starts to smile back, but she turns away from him, she was only playing the coquette again and she goes up to [...]Harold [...] and holds out her hand to him. This time, however, he pointedly ignores it.

-Don't you like the music, Harold? asks Earnestine, a little shook.

I like it.

It really isn't ladylike . . . Earnestine laughs nervously, as Mr' Johnson gives Harold an I-told-you-so nudge, but, since it's my birthday party, I'll ask . . . ha . . . shall we dance?

Mrs' Johnson puts a reminding hand on her son's shoulder. Harold doesn't even bother to answer Earnestine, he turns away deliberately and begins to talk to his parents. Earnestine is taken aback . . . she recovers, flashing a big smile, and swings back to Trinity and holds her arms out to him . . .

This one is for you, Earnestine says, as brightly as she can manage.

Trinity starts to step forward.

Second fiddle! whispers David, come on, a little while ago she was calling you mean!

Trinity stops. The chickens come home to roost, she reaps what she has sown, the shoe shifts to the other foot . . . he turns his back on Earnestine too. She flees from the room sobbing.

Crude but effective, David congratulates him.

Come on, let's start something and get it over with, says Trinity bitterly.

In a minute. David stands there gloating over victory at last. I'm savoring this moment, this is what I've waited for. They didn't appreciate my pure heart when I offered it, now they're going to pay. Yes, look at 'em, this is only the beginning! People are no damn good!

I get my rules from the Book of Life, David snickers mockingly, we'll teach 'em a lesson! He passes a bottle to Trinity and this time Trinity accepts willingly, even eagerly.

Miss Maybell takes off her apron with a sigh of satisfaction, the dinner is all in the oven — just a little more time for the browning. Well, I'll spruce up a little too, she says to herself and goes into the middle room to get her mandarin jacket with the big butterfly pattern and the gold trim. She gets up on the footstool to reach it down from the clothes line hanging over the bed when lo and behold, what does she see but her niece lying on the bedspread crying her heart out.

Earnestine! Miss Maybell gets her jacket and climbs down. What's the matter, child, seems like you spending half your party lying there being gloomy. Earnestine sits up.

Harold wouldn't dance with me, he just snubbed me, Auntie, like I was a dog.

I always knew the Johnsons were uppity, but I sure didn't realize they were that stuck up! But you weren't being so nice yourself, if I remember right, you kept making up to Harold but you told me you loved Trinity.

Trinity won't dance with me, either!

Earnestine has the nerve to try to be indignant, but Miss Maybell cuts that short.

Ha . . . good for him, only a fool gonna let you keep dogging 'em . . . good for him!

I just wanted to be high class! Oh, Auntie, you don't understand . . . I want to be modern, I'm trying to move up in life, I'm trying to get somewhere, I want to be somebody . . . I . . . I . . . Earnestine breaks into tears . . . Now I suppose you're going to think I'm ashamed of where I come from and of you . . . it's not that, Auntie, its . . .

Whoa, whoa, child, whoa, says Miss Maybell firmly, soothingly, like she was gentling a skittish horse. You let your old Auntie do her own supposing and thinking . . . you're right and you're wrong, child.

Miss Maybell finishes putting on her jacket and sits down next to Earnestine and gives her a short, stiff, and serious talking to. First, nobody thinks you're ashamed of where you're starting from just 'cause you want to do better. No, sir, that's where you're right. You're right to want to improve yourself. I've always struggled to do the same thing in my life, I ain't done so bad, maybe it don't look that way to you, but you just don't know how far back I had to start . . . he, ha, Lord, Lord . . . you want to make something more of yourself, Earnestine, and I respect you for it and I'm going to do everything I can to help you. Sure, move up in life, but remember, everything just because it's up aint perfect. Even the Devil himself got his start in heaven, and that's sure as up as anything could be. Anything that you think is upper class, you think is O'K' and that's where you're wrong, child. High class or anything else, don't go making nothing automatically right. You got to pick and choose for yourself, no matter how high you get . . . half of the trick of living is the shopping, child. As for that testing and teasing and hurting menfolks, them magazines you read call being a modern upper class woman. I already told you what I thought about that . . . Anyhow, next time you're downtown take a good look at some of them modern high class women, with them turned-down mouths and their get-even-with-the-world wrinkles scratching their faces all up . . . Whew! Well, I guess I done talked myself out . . .

It looks like auntie's speech has not fallen on deaf ears -finally it seems the horse is ready to drink . . .

Oh, Auntie, I've been so foolish, I should have listened to you in the first place.

Well, don't be too hard on yourself, Miss Maybell says kindly, live and learn. You can't keep from falling, everybody's gonna fall sometimes, you can't keep from it. The trick, though, is to keep getting back up.

But I lost Trinity. I lost him. I've lost him forever, I just feel it in my soul, what am I gonna do . . .

Miss Maybell tells her if she's lost him, she's just lost him, but the game ain't over till the last out, they always say, and the first thing she should do is hurry up and stop crying. Miss Maybell stands up.

David has finally finished ranting and savoring his moment. Once again he and Trinity, bottles in hand, move forward.

Break that . . .

DINNER'S READY! shouts Miss Maybell, parting the curtains and stepping into the living room.

They have waited too long. Poor Trinity's and David's battle cries are drowned in whoops of joy, plus they are almost trampled in the rush for the doorway.

Lordy, Lord, that's music to my ears, shouts Brother Washington.

Out of the way everybody, yells Sister Bowser, and she charges for the kitchen. Everybody laughs.

Whoa, take it easy, y'all. Miss Maybell blocks the middle room doorway. I been back there working and I've been hearing everyone up here laughing and enjoying themselves . . . Let me get myself a little dance, too.

-Well, that sounds fair enough, Sister Maybell, says Brother Bowser. Not too many, I hope, 'cause I'm mighty hungry.

I think one will do it, put on a nice record please, sugarplum, says Miss Maybell to Brother Percy.

Brother Bowser asks who's gonna be the lucky fellow. Miss Maybell walks over to Trinity and David.

Since you so hungry and I only got time for one dance, I'm gonna split it! I'm gonna dance half with Brother David here and half with Brother Percy. Everybody laughs and Brother Percy says that sounds fair enough to him . . . He just asks for a little time to find one real good one and starts searching through the stack of records.

Miss Maybell whispers in Trinity's ear that she knows somebody who is mighty sad about how bad they treated him. Trinity answers stiffly that he doesn't know what she means.

We'll show 'em that somebody is rotten, just like anybody else, whispers David in Trinity's ear on his side.

People is only human, even the people we love is only human, says Miss Maybell over on her side, and the Devil gets in them sometimes too.

I . . . I don't know what you means, says Trinity, a little shaken.

Don't even bother to listen, urges David on his side, remember what happened, I had the purest heart in history . . . Break that party . . .

Mistakes are part of learning, ain't they?

Tear that party, rip that party, break . . .

Yippee, yell the guests. Here comes the music! yells Brother Percy.

The record starts and it's a fast one. Miss Maybell grabs David and pulls him to the center of the living room . . .

Come on!

I can't! David whines.

Sure you can, Miss Maybell gives him a hug. I'll show you!

Go on, shout the guests, show your stuff now. They form a semicircle around Miss Maybell and David, they shout and clap their hands and encourage them on, yeah, yeah, you go to it, do it, do it, you got it.

Trinity is drawn to the curtain by that invisible magnet called love. He knows She is on the other side. He can't see her, but he can just see her anyway, sitting on the bed crying. He stands in the living room next to the curtain.

Earnestine, he speaks her name without even realizing it.

Earnestine, sitting on the bed in the middle room, hears his beloved voice.

Trinity, are you there? Earnestine turns her head toward the curtain, Trinity? . . . Trinity?

Trinity doesn't answer, he just stands there doing the famous block-of-salt imitation. Earnestine wonders if her aching heart's playing a trick on her, was that just a party noise or was that the voice of her dear Trinity calling her?

-It's my turn, proclaims Brother Percy and he cuts in on David and Miss Maybell.

Trinity, are you still there? Is she imagining it or did the curtain shake? Trinity, forgive me . . . Please . . .

Trinity, forgive me, mocks David, who has slipped away from the dancing and found Trinity's other ear again. Ha . . . I hope you're not stupid enough for that! Next she's going to be telling you SHE was mean, not YOU. Don't listen. That's not for me and you.

I'm sorry I called you mean, says Earnestine through the curtain. I was the mean one, not you.

You see, says David, on Trinity's other side, what did I tell you . . . the same old line!

Trinity, are you there? pleads Earnestine. Do you love me?

Get a bottle ready, snarls David, let's get in there, come on.

Trinity, I love you, confesses Earnestine timidly.

BREAK THAT PARTY
SMASH THAT PARTY
KILL THAT PARTY

David hisses the song. Like an Imp in a trance, Trinity moves toward an empty bottle.

Come on, Trinity, are we going to give them hell!

David knows that this time they have won, that the party is finished. Already he sees himself sitting around the Imp lounge in hell telling his exploits to a rapt audience. But he's not back in the Imp lounge yet unfortunately for him he makes a sweeping, majestic gesture with his free hand and Sister Bowser sees it and thinking it's an invitation to dance, grabs his arm, and jerks him to her bosom.

Come on, Brother David, we gonna catch the end of this song.

David has other plans, he struggles violently but in vain, swept along in the mixmaster of flesh. He doesn't want to dance, he doesn't want to dance, but what three hundred pounds wants, three hundred pounds gets.

After what seems a couple of eternities to him, the song ends and Bowser bear trap opens and releases David. He whirls around, but the place by the doorway is EMPTY. Trinity has disappeared! David dashes to the curtain and pulls it back and there is his expartner, sitting on the bed, tenderly hugging and kissing with Earnestine.

TRINITY!!! David shrieks.

Dinner's ready! Miss Maybell yells. Sister Bowser sings the blessing as the folks form a procession and file sedately into the kitchen . . .

HE IS THE STAFF OF LIFE
ON THE TABLE OF HIS HOLY WORD
THERES ALWAYS, ALWAYS A BANQUET FIT FOR A KING
PLATES HEAPED WITH HOPE AND FAITH
AND GOLDEN CUPS
BRIMMING WITH CHARITY

Everybody joins in the chorus, clapping and singing . . .

FEAST ON ME, FEAST ON ME, FEAST ON ME
BRING ME YOUR HUNGRY SOULS

SIT RIGHT DOWN AND FEAST ON ME
DIDNT HE TURN THE WATER TO WINE
AND MAKE THOSE OLD LOAVES MULTIPLY
THE SAVIOR YOU KNOW WILL NEVER
LET THE STOMACH OF YOUR SOUL
GO GROWLING
FEAST ON ME, FEAST ON ME, FEAST ON ME
BRING ME YOUR HUNGRY SOULS
SIT RIGHT DOWN AND FEAST ON ME
OH YES HE OPENED HIS ARMS
TO ALL THE WORLD AND HE SAID
SIT RIGHT DOWN AND
FEAST ON ME

Scene 8

8

Everyone is standing around the banquet spread. The overloaded kitchen table has been extended by the length of Miss Maybell's ironing board, providing four more table settings. One end of the ironing board rests on the end of the table and the other end rests on the back of a kitchen chair.

And we thank the Lord, prays Brother Percy.

Amen, repeats everyone. David is extremely uncomfortable during the prayer but no one seems to notice. As a matter of fact, David hadn't even planned to be around for grace. He had intended to change into a cockroach and slip under the door during the general confusion of getting seated. But suddenly there had come to him yet another sure-fire idea for breaking the party.

It's going to be kind of a squeeze, says Miss Maybell, excuse me for the crates, but I still don't have enough chairs to go around.

We all just plain folks anyway, says Brother Washington. Myself, I was raised on a crate. Everybody laughs. They all start to sit down.

I guess I shouldn't even bother to sit down, Mrs' Johnson announces as she takes her seat. My stomach is so delicate, especially in the evenings, I probably won't be able to eat a thing.

David's big opening has come . . .

Who do you think you're kidding, he says. WHY DON'T YOU QUIT LYING!!

At this unheard-of gall, Mrs' Johnson leaps to her feet . . .

Are you talking to ME?? she inquires icily.

Yes, to you, AND your delicate stomach! David hisses. Your stomach isn't any more delicate than a goat's. I don't know how you stay so skinny, you eat like a PIG!

Everybody gasps. Mr' Johnson jumps up and furiously asks David to repeat what he just said about his wife. David is in top shape, he's sure now that all hell is going to break loose.

I SAID SHE EATS MORE THAN SIX TRUCK DRIVERS!

What did you say about my mother? Harold springs to his feet.

HER STOMACH'S NO MORE DELICATE THAN ANYBODY ELSE'S AND SHE EATS LIKE SIX TRUCK DRIVERS AND SIX PIGS! David slowly stands up . . . he is radiant. Any moment now the battle will begin. The three Johnsons are lined up on one side of the table and he faces them on the other side. They lean forward and even Mrs' Johnson is almost taller than David.

Don't you like it? David challenges Harold, the biggest Johnson. Mr' Johnson replies that Harold is just a kid and steps in front of their precious boy while Mrs' Johnson throws a protective arm around their son.

How about you there . . . you want to do something about it? David asks Mr' Johnson.

Yes! answers Mr' Johnson firmly . . . pause . . . This is the moment David has been waiting for, he picks up a bottle from the table.

Yes, Mr' Johnson repeats . . . (here it comes, David's big moment, as soon as Mr' Johnson makes that first menacing move) But then Mr' Johnson doesn't follow through. His words advance but his feet retreat.

Yes . . . and I would do something if I didn't mind making myself common . . . I'd . . . I'd thrash you to a pulp!

Mrs' Johnson orders Harold to get their things immediately. Harold runs out of the room for a moment and dashes back in with their coats. Not a person has budged. The Johnsons grab their coats, open the outside door and start out without even taking time to put on their wraps.

You are lucky . . . mighty lucky, says Mr' Johnson, feeling secure now that he is safely across the threshold. He doubles his fist at David. You're mighty lucky that I'm a gentleman! They slam the door behind them . . . No one moves . . . Silence. David thinks that now he has at last won his Imp wings.

I GUESS . . . David has a hard time trying to keep the triumphant note out of his voice . . . I guess the party is broken. I guess THAT ENDS THE PARTY . . .

And indeed the party explodes — but not in anger. Rather, everybody bursts out laughing. Sister Bowser, who is sitting next to David, leaps up and throws her arms around him and gives him a big kiss. Sister Washington gets up from the other end of the table and runs around to David and gives him a hug too. All the women kiss him, and all the men pat him on the shoulder and everybody roars happily and shouts and showers him with congratulations and affection and tells him how wonderful he is.

What did I do? David is dumb-founded . . . What did I do?

Gradually the laughter subsides and everybody sits back down and starts to eat. David is still stunned, and he keeps asking what did he do? Miss Maybell tells Brother David to just go ahead, pull up and eat up, 'cause his dinner is getting cold. In the meantime she pours Brother Percy a drink . . . between bites, Sister Bowser declares to the Lord, aint Brother David wonderful, and everybody agrees . . . David sits there on the verge of tears . . . what is going on, what did he do? But, but but . . .

Finally, someone enlightens him.

You're the first person to ever tell off Mrs' Johnson, THAT'S WHAT! She's been pulling that delicate stomach act for years.

Nobody don't mind how much she eats, says Sister Washington, it just that she's such a hypocrite!

Aint it the truth, Brother Bowser says and everybody laughs.

Three cheers for Brother David, Trinity mocks. He stands up and proposes a toast, raising his glass in a salute.

Yessiree, seconds Brother Washington, rising to his feet. He sure deserves it, come on everybody, three cheers.

They give David three cheers. He glares at Trinity. Trinity is unruffled. He sits back down and puts his arm around Earnestine and, when no one is looking, he sticks his tongue out at David. Sister Bowser declares they aint never had a better party, Brother Bowser agrees that it couldn't be no better. Miss Maybell gets up and fetches another load of food from the stove and piles it on the table.

Come on, eat up, everybody. She pours a drink for Mr' Percy. Here, Brother Percy, have another drink.

I thought old Brother Sleepyhead wasn't allowed another drink, teases Brother Washington.

I ain't no kid. I know just how much I can take.

Yeah, when he passes out, that's all he can take, Brother Bowser puts in. Everybody laughs and Miss Maybell pours Brother Percy that fresh drink. The folks dig back into the food. There is only nitty-grit, down-home picnic conversation to be heard . . . Those pass-me-that-there-pleases, those could-I-have-some-more-of-them, those fill-her-up-pleases . . . there is a pause in the chumping as everyone catches his breath . . . Trinity takes the opportunity to make an announcement, he stands up slowly . . .

Miss Maybell?

Yes, son, what is it?

Miss Maybell . . . I . . . I have something to say.

Yes, sure, son. Everyone is looking at Trinity. Go ahead, what is it?

Earnestine and I are getting engaged.

Everyone is delighted! Sister Washington says it's wonderful, Sister Bowser says it's perfect, Brother Bowser says aint it the truth. Everyone laughs . . . Despite his protestations Brother Percy's beginning to get a little bit into the wind, he stumbles over to kiss the bride . . . Earnestine is all embarrassed and happy and flutters that she isn't a bride yet. He gives her a little peck on the cheek anyway and tells her, Well, better early than never. Everyone laughs and Brother Percy totters back to his seat. Miss Maybell beams at them, her heart is brimming over.

Earnestine, Trinity, that's fine, just fine. I wish you all the success and lots of happiness, too. I hope you have a long, full life. Be easy with one another. Remember, we're all just human beings.

Three cheers for Brother Trinity and to a long life! says David, standing and raising his glass sarcastically. He gives Trinity the filthiest look in the history of Impkind. Their eyes meet only for a moment. Trinity hears the menace in David's voice. David sits down and the guests give three cheers.

Gradually the atmosphere has changed, the boisterousness and clowning have gone, it's quiet and reverent. Everybody is touched.

Why are you ladies crying? asks Brother Washington gently, there ain't no need to cry.

Sister Washington says she ain't crying, she's just got something in her eyes. Crying, the idea, come on everybody, eat up!

Everybody starts digging in again. They start to fill up. They begin to sigh and slide down in their chairs, they begin to puff and eat more slowly.

OH MY GOODNESS exclaims Miss Maybell, I almost forgot something . . . THE BIRTHDAY CAKE!

Miss Maybell pushes through to the cupboard where she has hidden the cake behind the preserves and the bacon grease. It has "Happy Birthday, Earnestine" written on top and twenty candles too. Miss Maybell sets it down on the table and everybody claps and laughs.

Oh, Auntie! Earnestine is thrilled. When did you . . .

While you was at work, child. Turn off the lights, somebody!

Brother Washington reminds them that maybe they ought to light the candles first. Brother Bowser goes over by the light. There is a little bit of confusion but finally the candles are all lit. O'K', go ahead, honey, they're all lit! his wife calls and he flicks the switch. Everything is dark except for the gentle lights from the birthday candles flickering on the faces around the table. It's very pretty.

oooOOHHH . . . everyone sighs in admiration.

Take yourself a deep breath, Earnestine, says Sister Washington.

Wait a minute! says Brother Percy, -the song! Brother Percy starts singing "Happy Birthday to You" and everybody joins in . . .

Go ahead, honey, Miss Maybell softly coaches, take a deep breath . . .

Earnestine is radiant. She and Trinity look at each other, seeing in each other's eyes reflections of the tiny pink and orange candle flames, fireflies of affection. The pinpoint reflections shimmer as their eyes fill and brim with love, real love. Maybe that saying is true about God working in strange and mysterious ways, maybe when the Devil sent his Imps to look for a party it was the Lord's work he was doing. Maybe if Earnestine had never met Trinity she would have continued on her phony path until it was too late, maybe . . .

Go ahead, honey, take a deep breath.

Earnestine takes a deep breath and blows out the candles. Brother Bowser turns on the lights and everyone claps for Earnestine . . .

Miss Maybell cuts the cake and passes it out . . . they eat their cake and sigh contentedly, filled with well-being.

Lordy, Lordy, that was mighty delicious cake, Miss Maybell, says Brother Washington.

The whole meal was mighty delicious, adds Sister Bowser.

Lord, teases Brother Percy, with his hands folded as if he were praying, us poor folks sure thank thee for Saturday night parties!

-AMEN! Brother Washington pushes himself back from the table.

Welllll, I guess it's just about that time! He turns to his missus. Come on, honey, guess we'd better start making tracks for home.

Yes, it's that time, says Brother Bowser, pushing himself back from the table too. Come on, old lady, let's be getting along.

Brother Washington looks over at Brother Percy, who has quietly fallen asleep with his arms folded on the ironing board, and remarks that it didn't look like Miss Maybell should have given him those last drinks after all and does she need some help with him . . . Naw, Miss Maybell says, she'll put him to bed as soon as everybody's gone, he is light as a feather anyhow.

The guests file out to the middle room for their wraps.

Scene 9

9

In the middle room Miss Maybell and Earnestine are helping the guests with their wraps.

In the kitchen Brother Percy is sleeping with his head on his arms and a smile on his face. Trinity is finishing his second piece of cake and David is beside himself with rage . . .

Earnestine and I are getting engaged! mimics David angrily. This is the last time I'll ever be your partner. I don't like practical jokers. I'm through with you. Come on, let's get out of here . . . David turns toward the door and gets ready to turn himself into a cockroach and escape under the doorsill. Then he has another one of his famous ideas. Why not do it the easy way? Sure, they can't go through wood and brick and stuff, but if somebody else opens the door they can walk out with everyone else, just so long of course as they aren't the last ones to leave the scene of an unfinished crime. Get ready . . .

Like a lot of folks, David's sensitivity begins and ends with himself. It hasn't hit him, he doesn't even sense that the Trinity he once knew is gone, and there he is, Mr' Bossy, giving orders as usual.

Let's do it the easy way, we'll wait until they start to leave, just be sure we aren't the last ones out. David points to Brother Percy snoring on the table. He doesn't count, he lives here half of the time.

David, let's stay.

What, be a human being? I hate people!

Trinity nods. I think you always did.

They didn't appreciate my pure heart when I gave it to them. David stamps his foot. I'm going!

I'm staying!

-Staying! David glares, his eyes narrowing to slits of hate. You know the rules! he points a warning finger at Trinity. You'll be turned into a human being, just like you are, standing there . . . and you'll be colored too! Remember this is America! You were an American, you know what America's like. You'll be colored . . . remember — NIGGER — just think what that means, nigger, nigger . . . for all your life . . .

I'm staying, I don't care.

You will . . . you will . . . David sneers. So you're going to live a new life!

I wasn't living the first time.

You had a big future, a big future ahead of you, says David. The Master will be very disappointed, but if he ever gets his hands on you, he'll even the score. And I'm going to make a report as soon as I get back!

Trinity says he figured that's what he'd do. David says to expect some extra-special treatment to be waiting for him when he does return.

I'm not planning to end up there, Trinity says.

Just a few slips . . . David says. The folks start to leave. Miss Maybell opens the door, the Bowsers say what a wonderful time they have had and wish everybody good night and leave.

Brother Washington gets tired of waiting for Sister Washington to come out of the toilet. He says it looks like she's going to stay in there all night and that he's going downstairs to catch a little fresh air. Tell old sleepyhead good night for me, he says, pointing to Brother Percy, then he tips his hat, wishes everyone, David, Trinity, Earnestine and Miss Maybell, good night and leaves . . .

I've got to go but we'll be waiting on you, David whispers to Trinity, then he raises his voice and heads for the door. I hope to see you soon, Brother Trinity . . . well good night, everyone!

Before David can get all the way out of the door Miss Maybell grabs him and pulls him back. David is horrified, he tries to shake loose, he drags her one way and she pulls him back again. Raw terror gives him triple strength so they have a pretty even tug-of-war going. Since the party hasn't been broken, he's GOT to leave before the last guest is gone and there is only Mrs' Washington left and any second now she'll be coming out of the toilet and . . .

Don't go, Miss Maybell whispers in his ear, the party's not over.

What?

No, the party's not over. For a moment there, David wonders if he has lost his mind or something . . . then he notices that familiar old gleam and that seductive tone in her whisper.

Stay around, it's not over . . .

David stops struggling to leave, there is a lecherous smile on his lips.

Come on, Earnestine, help me get him up in the front room, says Miss Maybell, indicating Brother Percy. They steer him to his feet and out of the room. Miss Maybell whispers to David as she exits that she won't be long.

You're staying! Trinity runs around the table and gives David a big whirling hug. The outside door, the ironing board, the imitation brick Contact paper above the tub sink, the leavings of the roast, icing on a plate, the middle door, Old Smasher on a nail, the refrigerator and the stove all zip past David's eyes.

You decided to stay! That's wonderful!

Staying! David throws back his head and gives his most vicious laugh. Ha ha ha . . . staying! David is smug, triumphant, gleeful. He shakes his finger under Trinity's nose, he rubs his hands together and leaps up and clicks his heels. Ha ha ha . . . No, I'm not leaving for the moment, but I won't be staying very long . . . you don't understand, do you?

Trinity admits he doesn't, he shrugs his shoulders at this one. He knew they would be stretching the rules a bit before if they had attacked the guests and gotten a fight going on their own, though at least they could have pleaded the evil of Harold Johnson's provocation or something . . . But he can't figure out what David's plan is this time.

It's simple, David snaps his finger, the party isn't over . . . THE PARTY ISN'T OVER, but it soon will be. Glee, gloating and wickedness are all stirred around in his voice. David is sure he has won. He struts around the kitchen, patting his conked head, swaggering, bragging . . . But it soon will be, I've got an ace up my sleeve . . . If there is one thing I know, it's women. I know what she really wants, even if she won't admit it, they're all natural hypocrites. You watch! When I start giving her what she really wants, all hell is gonna break loose — one broken party!

David is as happy as he can be. He bursts into a little ditty, dancing and singing around the kitchen . . .

OH YOUVE GOT TO PLAY THE GAME IF YOU WANT TO GET THE PRIZE
FROM THE VERY FIRST SECOND

A WOMAN WANTS THE SAME THING AS YOU

BUT TELL HER SO AND SHE'LL DENY THAT ITS TRUE

OH YOUVE GOT TO PLAY THE GAME IF YOU WANT TO GET THE PRIZE

FIRST YOUVE GOT TO SPEND SOME OF THAT OLD MONEY

SWEAT OUT THAT BLOOD AND TELL THOSE LIES

OH YOUVE GOT TO PLAY THE GAME IF YOU WANT TO GET THE PRIZE

IF SHE ASKS YOU WHY SHE ATTRACTS YOU

HA YOUD BETTER SAY HER EYES

CAUSE IF YOU DONT PLAY THE PHONY GAME YOU WONT GET THE PRIZE

BE DIRECT BE HONEST BE STRAIGHT-FORWARD YOULL BE OUT OF LUCK

THE HYPOCRISY OF WOMEN IS THE SYSTEM YOU CANT BUCK

OH YOUVE GOT TO PLAY THE PHONY GAME OR YOULL NEVER GET THE PRIZE

Earnestine comes back into the kitchen and starts cleaning up . . .

Auntie will be right out, Mr' David. I think she likes you a lot.

That's nice . . . He nudges the crestfallen Trinity in the ribs and winks. All the better, that'll just add to the deceit!

David goes over and sits down, the spider waiting for the fly . . .

Miss Maybell comes in, beaming. Well that didn't take so long, did it? she says brightly.

Come here, my little chickadee, David says and he grabs her and pulls her down onto his lap. He leans her backwards à la Valentino and gives her a big kiss. They almost fall over . . .

Ah HA! Struggling! says David.

I'm not struggling. I was just getting my balance.

Don't lie to me! I know women . . . David starts kissing her passionately, Miss Maybell squeezes him back and smiles patiently.

Go ahead, scream . . . I don't care, he says. But instead of screaming, Miss Maybell gives him another squeeze . . .

I ain't screaming.

Don't play the hypocrite with me David is getting nervous . . . When is she going to start pulling the naïve virgin act on him. It slowly begins to dawn on him that things aren't going exactly as he foresaw. He begins to run his hands lasciviously over her leg . . .

You know what I want, admit it! he says.

I admit it, she replies.

Do you know what I'm going to do to you!!! David tries to sound fiendish, but to Miss Maybell's ears, he only sounds sexier.

Well, I don't know what you're gonna do in particular she answers happily . . . but in general I got a pretty good idea.

Miss Maybell throws her arms around David and starts laying big fine kisses on him. David tries to get up, he squirms and wiggles, Miss Maybell is almost dumped on the floor but somehow she manages to hold herself on his knees, she figures he is just revving his motor up. David hits the panic button.

I'm getting out of here! David screams, while Miss Maybell keeps on hugging and smooching. I'M GETTING OUT OF HERE!!!

A huge clap of thunder, a puff of smoke and the lights flicker off, then sputter back on. David has disappeared. Miss Maybell, a little worse for the wear and tear, is half sprawled off the chair where a second ago she was perched on David's lap. Miss Maybell blinks her eyes two or three times, sits up, straightens her skirt and shakes her head, then she is back to her normal old roll-with-the-punches-of-life self again.

Lordy, Lord, says Miss Maybell half to herself, I guess he didn't know his business.

I'm sorry, Trinity starts.

Oh, I knew he wasn't no angel, she shrugs, but I ain't never heard of no man running out on a woman . . . BEFORE!

The three of them start straightening up the kitchen. Earnestine and Trinity alternate between holding hands and stacking the dishes. Miss Maybell arranges the furniture, she picks up the chair she was just sitting in when suddenly something catches her eye . . .

Earnestine she screams and she points her finger at something moving along the floor.

THERE GO ONE OF THEM DEVILS! . . . QUICK, GIVE ME OLD SMASHER WHILE I KEEP AN EYE ON HIM!

Earnestine grabs Old Smasher and hands it to her Auntie in one deft motion, like a nurse passing a scalpel.

DEVIL? asks Trinity.

COCKROACH, explains Earnestine.

It sho seems like he is trying to make for the door, Miss Maybell says. She weaves around the room in a crouch, following the roach with Old Smasher poised for action. Just as soon as the rascal comes out in the open I'll get him . . .

Suddenly Trinity understands. He jumps to his feet horrified.

The roach makes a dash for the door. Miss Maybell follows its path.

There he is!!

NO! Trinity screams.

YES!

Miss Maybell comes down with a deadly swing . . .

WHACK!

GOT HIM! says Miss Maybell. Trinity moans and slumps into a chair. Miss Maybell inspects the latest greasy spot on Old Smasher.

Humph . . . There wasn't really much to that devil!

Trinity groans. Miss Maybell is touched and goes over and puts her arms around him . . .

That's the way it is, son, that's just the way it is. If you let one of them devils get a foot in the door, pretty soon they'll be taking over the whole place . . .

Miss Maybell lays out life to him . . .

IF YOU SEE A DEVIL SMASH HIM
CAUSE HE AINT ABOUT TO LEAVE YOU ALONE
YES ITS A MATTER OF SOMEBODY HAS TO GO HIM OR YOU
IF YOU WANT A CLEAN HOUSE HEED THIS LESSON
HERES WHAT YOU ALWAYS GOT TO DO
IF YOU SEE A DEVIL SMASH HIM
HES HERE TO GET YOU
WITH A DEVIL THERE AINT NO SUCH THING AS LIVE AND BEING LET ALONE
THERE AINT NO DEALS OR TREATIES
THERE AINT NO POLITE COMPROMISE
ITS A MATTER OF SOMEBODY HAS TO GO HIM OR YOU
IF YOU SEE A DEVIL SMASH HIM THEYRE STRICTLY OUT TO WIN
THE DEVIL PLAYS FOR KEEPS, THERE AINT NO DRAWS
WHEN YOU TANGLE WITH A DEVIL ITS HIM OR YOU
SMASH HIM SMASH HIM SMASH HIM

Miss Maybell goes over to the wall and hangs up Old Smasher, until the next time . . .